





Jane Stuart—Twin

BY

Grace M. Remick

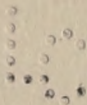
Author of the

"Glenloch Girls" Series, etc.

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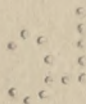


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Introduction

THIS first book about Jane Stuart is a "getting-acquainted" story. Jane, herself, is a sort of April weather girl, and even those who know her best can't tell what she will probably do next. Like Ruth Shirley of the Glenloch Girls stories, she is friendly and gay, and can usually be depended upon to see the funny side of things. Sometimes, however, she has to reach that state of mind by stormy ways.

Jane's summer in the little town, which she expected to dislike, proved to her that the best of air-castles will sometimes come down with a crash, that friendly people and good times are to be found almost everywhere, and that there is nothing in the world more precious to her than her own family.

In the next book *The Snow-Shoe Club*, which has other kinds of fun when snow-shoeing is not possible, a certain little society of which Jane becomes an important member, and the joys and tribulations of High School life, promise good times for Jane and David, her twin brother.

GRACE M. REMICK.

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Jane Stuart, Twin.

Jane Stuart, Twin

CHAPTER I

THE MAY QUEEN

"I DON'T see how I got it if it goes to the most popular girl in the class." Jane was trying to answer very seriously a remark that had just been flung at her, but her gray eyes were dancing, and her dimple would show in spite of all efforts to conceal it.

"You're a perfect give-away, Jane Stuart. You know you're a spoiled child and that everything comes your way. There wasn't a chance for any other girl to be chosen queen."

Jane, escorted to her own door as usual by this particular group of girls, smiled down at her friends from the door-step. It was a cloudy March afternoon, threatening rain, but not even the weather could dampen her high spirits. As she stood there an ambitious sunbeam broke through the clouds, and for an instant shone straight into her laughing eyes and turned her yellow locks to gold.

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“O-oh,” she said, shrinking a little. “You wouldn’t believe such a dark cloud could have any sunshine in it, would you?”

“Which only goes to prove that you are bound to get all there is,” said the girl who had spoken before, with a pretense of great wisdom. “Good-bye, cherub, till Monday. You really do look exactly like one.”

“Farewell, Lady Jane. I’m certainly coming over to learn how you tie that dinky bow. There isn’t another girl in the ——”

A confusion of farewells and last remarks interrupted the speaker, and the gay group drifted away, Jane smiling and waving until they were out of sight. She didn’t mind losing the last part of the unfinished remark; she could guess pretty well how it would have ended, for the girls were always raving over her bows and clothes and nice, straight nose.

“I’m a poet and didn’t know it,” she said to herself with a little laugh just as the maid opened the door.

“Is mother in, Katie? Are there any letters for me?” and answering her last question with a hasty glance at the hall table, Jane went into the parlor and without taking off her hat, sat down at the piano.

“Specially nice feelings always have to be

The May Queen

treated to a little music," she was thinking as she dashed into a gay waltz she had lately been practicing. She loved to play effective things that didn't give her much trouble in the learning.

It had been an unusually good day in school; even arithmetic hadn't bothered her as it sometimes did. They were going to put a drawing of hers in the school paper; that would please mother, she knew. It seemed quite likely that she would have a part in the graduation play. And to be chosen queen for the out-of-door May celebration was perfectly joyful.

"Good things certainly do seem to come my way," she said aloud, snapping off the waltz with some final chords, and jumping up from the piano-stool. "And by the same token there ought to be a new white dress coming to little Jane. I'll go up and see what mother thinks about it."

She was singing as she started up the stairs, but the sight of Judy's face peering over the balusters made her stop abruptly. She couldn't have told why, for there was nothing imposing about Judy, who was short and thin, and much younger-looking than her eleven years. Jane herself was nearly fourteen, and large for her age, but, nevertheless, there was a coolly critical expression in her small sister's blue eyes, and a disapproving

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droop about the mouth which often took the edge off of Jane's good spirits.

"I shouldn't think you'd bang the piano and screech like that when something's the matter with your family." Judy's manner was distinctly depressing, and the terms she applied to her sister's musical efforts would have discouraged any one less buoyant than Jane.

"What's the matter with my family now? Have you cut your finger or has Kenneth ——?" Jane felt it a waste of breath to go on, for her offended sister had retreated with dignity into the playroom and carefully closed the door. There was nothing to worry about, though, she felt sure. Judy could always be depended on to make the smallest trouble seem big.

She peeped into her mother's room, but no one was there. She remembered then that Katie had said her mother was out.

"Where's mother, and has David come from school yet?" she demanded a few moments later, opening the playroom door to find her sister wholly absorbed in a piece of fancy work.

"Mother has gone to see the lawyer," Judy announced importantly. "Mr. Hartley telephoned when we were in the middle of eating lunch, and she didn't even wait to finish."

"Is that what you call trouble in the family?"

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Well, I didn't suppose it would be anything worse than that. Did mother say when she would be back?"

"No; and when she kissed me good-bye she looked awful pale and worried. She was as white—as white as this." Judy held up the rather grimy embroidery upon which she was working. "I'm hurrying to finish this and s'prise her with it when she does come. P'raps it will make her feel better."

Jane, quickly sympathetic, forbore to smile, and praised the straggling stitches with all her heart.

"That's a perfectly fine idea," she said warmly, "and I know mother will be pleased. I'll get Katie to press it for you if you want me to."

"I wish you would." Judy was visibly delighted at this unexpected concession. "Katie's most always willing to do things for you."

She was gazing at her sister with a sort of grudging admiration in her face as the latter walked around the room looking at one thing and another. She wondered how much bread and butter and milk she should have to eat to make her eyes as bright and her cheeks as rosy as Jane's. Perhaps it would be worth while trying all the wholesome things she didn't like if she could only be tall and straight and —

"Julia Stuart, you've been using my best draw-

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ing-paper again, and I'd thank you to let it alone," Jane said sharply. "I'm going to ask mother if you can't be forbidden to touch my things."

"Better keep 'em in your own room, then," retorted Judy with irritating calmness. "When Davy leaves his things in the playroom Ken and I know we can use 'em if we want to."

"Well, I'm not David, and you're not to make use of mine even if I do leave them here. Oh, dear, I wish David would come. There's the front door banging now. Perhaps——"

"You might have known that wasn't Davy. He never bangs the door," observed Judy, prolonging her remark so that it might not miss the ear of the curly-haired boy who rushed into the room at that moment.

"Now, look here, Judy Stuart, Dave is no such goody-goody as you make him out." Kenneth was sternly defiant, and quite ignored the criticism of himself in his championship of his brother. "He could slam the door all right if he wanted to, but he just happens to keep hold of it a little longer, that's all."

"Oh, of course, that's all," agreed Julia with the superior smile which to Kenneth always seemed to flaunt the fact that she was two years older, and correspondingly wiser.

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"Say, Janey, did you get elected queen?" he asked, changing the subject of conversation abruptly. "Jenksy said his sister thought you would be, but I wasn't sure. 'Course I know you'd make a dandy one."

"Yes, I did," answered Jane happily. "Isn't it fine?"

"Jenksy said that if you did, it meant you were awful well liked in your class," pursued Kenneth.

"Oh, pooh, she's been sweet to the girls all the year for that." Judy's tone seemed to take the romance out of everything. "All the nice things happen to her, anyway. I just wish they could see her at home sometimes."

"Well, I hope you're disagreeable enough about it," Jane answered hotly. "I think you might be a little glad your sister got it. As for all the nice things happening to me, I don't know what you mean. And I don't see that I'm such a perfect villain at home either."

"Janey's mad, and I am glad," hummed Judy tantalizingly.

"I'm going into my own room," Jane announced with dignity, ignoring her sister's satisfied smile. "If David comes, Ken, will you tell him where I am, and please let me know the minute mother comes in."

"Sure," assented Kenneth, by this time wholly

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absorbed in a book. He looked up just before his sister reached the door. "Say, Lady J.," he remarked, regarding her critically, "I b'lieve you look just about like the princess in this story. She had long, thick yellow hair, and kind of smily eyes, and pink cheeks. I don't blame the prince for wanting to kill a dragon for her. You bet I would have."

"Humph," observed Judy drily, as Jane sped across the room, gave her young brother a swift hug, and then departed like a whirlwind. "I s'pose not one of your princesses ever had a freckled nose, did she, Ken?"

There was a wistful softening of the sharp voice, an unconscious plea in the thin face that would have challenged her brother's chivalry had he perceived it. Though he had never really put it into words, it was part of his creed to make people comfortable in their minds if they weren't too disagreeable to him. Deep in delivering the fatal thrust to the dragon, however, he heard and saw nothing else.

For a wonder Judy resisted the temptation to interrupt his pleasure, and during the next few moments stuck her needle in fiercely, and pulled it out with impatient jerks. Suddenly a large, hot tear slid down her freckled nose, and she dabbed at it vigorously with the dingy doily.

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"Everybody likes Jane best," she half whispered, "but I don't care; I don't care."

In her own room Jane was banishing her irritation by trying on some new hair-ribbons which she had bought on the way home from school.

"Judy ought not to be allowed to be so mean," she said to herself, as she laid a soft pink ribbon against her blonde locks. The combination was vastly soothing to her feelings, and she began almost at once to think more leniently of her sister. "I suppose she wouldn't have been so spoiled if she'd been well. It must be horrid not to be so big and strong as girls of your own age."

For a few moments she was wholly absorbed in finding some new way in which to knot the ribbon. "There," she murmured at last with a satisfied air, "I call that a stylish bow. I've never seen one just like it, either. I wonder if I am artistic. Mabel Haynes is always telling me so. But this afternoon she said I was spoiled, and I don't want to trust her opinion about that."

She took off the pink ribbon regretfully and smoothed out the wrinkles, remembering that her mother had said these new ones must be for best.

"There's Spinks now," she said to herself, stopping to listen as she heard David come up-stairs and walk by her door. He had been such a

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solemn, thoughtful little boy that some friend of the family had dubbed him "Sphinx," and his sister's nickname for him had come from her early attempts at the word.

Jane started toward the door, but stopped short, and turned back to rummage wildly in the untidy depths of her upper bureau drawer. "I'll give this perfectly good blue ribbon to Judy," she planned. "And she can have my blue penholder she's always been so crazy about."

A moment later she was dropping the gifts over her sister's shoulder as she sat curled up on the rug before the fire. "Here, Judy," she said good-naturedly. "Get your brush, and I'll fix your hair and tie the nicest bow I can for you."

Judy looked up with a cry of pleasure over the treasures showered upon her, and at the same time a voice from the other side of the room called amiably, "Hello, Janey. What's doing?"

Jane walked over to the window where David, her twin, half hidden behind the curtains, was reading the evening paper. Even when their heads were close together they were surprisingly alike, for both were tall for their thirteen years, and David's hair was as yellow and his cheeks as rosy as his sister's. Noses, also, were identical, but the boy's gray eyes were steadier and more dependable than the girl's, and his mouth firmer.

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"I suppose you've heard that I'm to be queen," said Jane, trying hard to make it sound as if royalty were an every-day thing with her.

"No! You don't mean it." David was quite as surprised and pleased as she had hoped he would be. "I don't know why I'm so astonished, though. You're the best—well, there aren't many good-looking girls in the class."

"Thanks," drawled his sister. "There wasn't much of a choice, was there?"

"Well, I guess you'd have got it anyway," he conceded with a laugh. "What does that make me if I'm brother to a queen?"

"Makes you proud and conceited, of course," put in Kenneth, looking up from his book for the first time. "I am."

"Do make him stop reading in such a bad light," said Judy, whose attention had been withdrawn from her younger brother for some time.

Kenneth growled an ineffectual protest when David's strong arm came around his neck, and the book was removed from his clutching fingers.

"You're the only one of us that's got brown eyes like mother's, Ken, and you're not going to be allowed to spoil 'em," said his brother, tucking the offending book under his arm.

"Aw, I was just getting the princess out of an

Jane Stuart, Twin

awfully tight place," Kenneth protested in an injured tone. "You wouldn't have thought of doing that if Judy hadn't said so."

"I should if I'd happened to look at you."

"Anyway, David's the head of the family when mother isn't here, and we all have to mind him," said Judy with unusual sweetness. She was admiring herself in the mirror, Jane having just tied the blue ribbon in a fascinating bow.

"Mother told me," Kenneth began dreamily, "that when I was a baby, and David was five, and father died, Davy said he was going to take father's place and ——"

"We've all heard that story before, cub," cut in his brother ungratefully. "I must have been a conceited kidlet to think I could. I believe I'll run out to the corner and meet mother when she gets off the car. Just see if she has her raincoat with her, will you, Jane?"

Jane, who was standing under the electric light looking over the paper, answered nothing, but gazed at her twin with a queer, startled expression that drew him to her side at once.

"Did you see this?" she whispered, trying not to attract the attention of the younger children. "Isn't that the bank mother's money is in? It says the stockholders will suffer heavy losses."

David read the head-lines and the notice of the

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bank failure in the slow way that often made his sister impatient. "That must be what old Mr. Stone meant when I met him this afternoon and he asked me if mother was a stockholder there," he said in a low voice. "He didn't wait a second for me to answer, but just dashed on looking scared to death. And Mr. Hartley telephoned, Judy said. He must have wanted to tell mother so that she wouldn't see it first in the paper. Where's my cap? I must go right out and meet her."

But before he could move, Judy, who had stolen quite close to them, stopped him. "I heard mother say 'bank' when Mr. Hartley telephoned," she said eagerly. "And she looked scared just like old Mr. Stone. Davy, do you s'pose we're going to be very poor?"

"Trust you for hearing what you're not wanted to hear," groaned poor David, who had thought his remarks quite inaudible. He blamed himself for letting "Miss Pry," as Judy was frequently called, find out something that his mother might want to keep to herself for a while. Kenneth, too, was listening with wide-eyed curiosity.

"Now, look here, all of you," began David with that sober authority which always had its effect on the other children. "Something's gone wrong with the bank mother's money is in. Perhaps it isn't so bad as the paper says. At any rate we

Jane Stuart, Twin

don't want to bother mother about it until she's all ready to tell us."

"When she comes in we'll just try to make her comfy and rested, and not ask her a single question," suggested Jane with real heroism, for she was burning with curiosity, and hardly knew how she could wait another minute.

"Newspapers don't always get everything right," said Kenneth. "Perhaps it's some other bank and not ours at all."

David, standing where the firelight fell full upon his sober young face, looked thoughtfully at the others. "Whichever way it turns out it's up to us to make mother feel that we think it's all right," he decreed with inspiring earnestness. "Father took care of us as long as he lived, and then mother did, and we've had everything we needed, and pretty nearly everything we wanted, so we ought to do better when trouble comes than children who haven't been taken care of and told how."

"Why, Davy, that makes me think of the story you read to us." Jane's eyes were very bright and her cheeks flushed. "The one about 'Noblesse Oblige,' or something like that. Don't you remember we decided it meant that if you belonged to an honorable family, and had a great many comforts, and—and advantages, you ought to be

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more willing to do the right thing on that account. Now isn't that just like us? Couldn't we make it English and say 'Stuart obliges'?"

"Sure we can," answered David, much impressed by the way his twin had made the matter clear. "Let's have 'Stuart obliges' for our secret watchword. What say?"

"'S. O.' for short," proposed Kenneth. "I will and Judy will."

"You needn't answer for me, Kenneth Stuart. But I'll be in it all the same, Davy. I'd love to."

"Very well, then, we'll shake on it," proclaimed David.

At this the four children turned their backs to each other, and stretching out right hands clutched and shook the hands they met, while David slowly counted five. It was a form of vow instituted by the twins when they were very young, and it was considered by all four of the children to be absolutely binding.

"Now I'm going out to wait on the corner until mother comes," said David, starting for the door when this ceremony was over. "There she is now," he added, dashing from the room as the door-bell sounded, and down-stairs two steps at a time. Judy and Kenneth ran into the hall and looked over the balusters, but Jane struggled with an incomprehensible desire to flee to her own room and shut

Jane Stuart, Twin

the door. She never knew what to say to people who were in trouble. Somehow it made even her own mother seem different.

Then, at the first sound of the dear, familiar voice, Jane's world righted itself, and she flew out into the hall to meet them. The two younger children were cuddling mother's hands, and David's arm was around her as they all went along the hall. Her smile was the first thing Jane made sure of, and then she noticed that mother's eyes were very bright and her cheeks redder than usual.

"Oh, children," she was saying as they escorted her into the playroom, "are you all safe and sound? I thought I should never get here, and I fancied all sorts of things might have happened to you."

"We're all right. We're awfully all right, mumsey," answered Kenneth with significant earnestness. "And I'm going to run down and ask Katie for a cup of tea for you. You're as wet as—as ——" and failing in the effort to find any comparison complimentary enough to suit his feelings, he rushed from the room.

"I'll put away your hat and get your slippers, mother," said Jane eagerly, "and you sit down here by the fire and let me take off your shoes." But before she finished speaking David had pulled

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an armchair in front of the fire, and was unbuttoning the wet shoes.

"I'm going to dry all these places on the bottom of your dress," announced Judy, holding up a section of the skirt to the heat, and almost scorching her face in her desire to be useful.

"There, now I feel as warm as toast," said Mrs. Stuart, giving her empty cup to David. "Such nice children as mine are," she went on, pulling Judy into her lap, and putting an arm around Kenneth who had perched himself on her chair. "Come closer, twinnies. It does me more good than anything else to feel you all near me."

There was something in their mother's voice which thrilled all four of the listeners. David, since there was no bit of his mother available, embraced the back of her chair with unconscious fervor. Jane, giving her twin a speaking glance, laid her cheek on the hand that was holding Kenneth, while Judy, as though afraid of saying something she ought not to say, buried her face in the babyish fashion which the others often criticized, but which no one minded now.

It was Kenneth who first broke the silence which enfolded the little group. "I tell you what, mother," he began in his most absorbed fashion, "I could very soon earn good money as a shuffer. Mr. Downing's George says I'd make a

Jane Stuart, Twin

fine one if he could have the teaching of me. And then perhaps if Davy could get a place it wouldn't make so much difference about the bank." He stopped abruptly after the last word, conscious for the first time of the effect he was producing on his audience, and realizing that he had broken faith with David, who was staring at him with reproachful eyes.

"Oh, I didn't mean to say that," he blustered, growing very red in the face, and very miserable in his mind all at once. "I was just planning——" then he relapsed into helpless silence, and tried to wriggle out from his mother's detaining arm.

"It's all right, Ken," comforted mother, holding him fast and turning so that she could look at the twins. "I'm glad you said that. I didn't realize that my bad news had got home before me, and I meant to wait until I could know definitely how bad it is. But now I'll tell you all I can."

Mrs. Stuart made the explanation as simple as she could, but the most that Judy and Kenneth understood was that some man had been dishonest, and they would probably have to make up for it by being poor, perhaps poor enough to sell their house.

"You can have all the money I've got in my bank," Judy said with the color rushing into her

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thin little face. "And—and I was planning to eat a lot so's to get as pretty as Jane, but I won't need to, 'cause you'll all like me just the same even if I am only nine-year-old size."

"Oh, Judy dear," began mother, half laughing, half crying, and looking all of a sudden very little and pale and tired, "I didn't mean ——"

But the words were taken out of her mouth by the impetuous Jane, who swooped down upon the group in the armchair and took as many of them as she could in her strong young arms.

"Mother, darling, don't talk about it any more to-day," she said tenderly. "We'll all help, whatever happens. And as for being poor"—Jane's youthful voice was almost scornful in its passionate disregard of the pleasures money can buy—"perhaps there's some mistake, and we shan't be. Anyway, we've got each other, and nothing can matter much so long as we're all together."

"Nor so long as there's such a jolly good supper waiting for us," proclaimed Kenneth, who found the present situation trying, and welcomed Katie's appearance at the door. "Say, Judy, we've got waffles, and I advise you to eat yourself up to ten-year-old size to-night, before we find out whether we're truly poor or not."

At which sage advice even the sober David laughed, and they all trooped down to supper, each

Jane Stuart, Twin

secretly resolving to do his best to make the meal a cheerful one.

So successful was Jane in keeping up the spirits of the family that it wasn't until her mother had kissed her good-night and left her in darkness that troubled thoughts again held sway. At last, as she turned her pillow for what seemed the hundredth time, and snuggled her hot cheek into its coolness, an irrepressible sob escaped her. "I don't believe," she whispered quiveringly, "I don't believe any one could say that all the good things were coming my way now."

CHAPTER II

“ MRS. JANES ”

To Jane the next two weeks seemed like a long, distracting dream in which everything went wrong, and the most familiar persons and things had a wholly unnatural air. There were days when she firmly believed everything would go on as it always had. Other days when her lively fancy made the situation even worse than it was, and she pictured the entire family reduced to beggary.

She could not stand pity, and when well-meaning persons tried to sympathize her tongue grew contrary, and she belittled the importance of it all to such a degree that older people shook their heads wisely over her childish ignorance of what such a misfortune would mean to her mother. Schoolmates clung to her staunchly, however, and showed quite plainly that they thought her a real heroine, and this was balm to Jane's harassed soul.

Only David really understood the outward lightness and the inward ferment of his twin's mental

Jane Stuart, Twin

state, and it was to him she turned for comfort, and for answers to the questions with which she could not bear to trouble her mother.

“Busy, Jane?” he asked one afternoon, poking his head into his twin’s room to find her rearranging furniture and tidying bureau drawers.

“Almost finished. Has mother got home yet? Do sit down and tell me whether anything has been decided.”

David dropped into the rocking-chair, but no immediate report seemed to be forthcoming. Instead he stuck both hands into his pockets and appeared to be counting the books on the shelves.

“Oh, slowness! Hurry up!” scolded Jane, giving him an admonitory poke as she passed.

“This is an awfully pretty room, Mrs. Janes.” David’s gaze wandered from books to pictures, and then to the toilet-table, where his sister had just made the most advantageous display of the silver she possessed. “Do you know, though, I believe it will be good sport fixing up rooms in—in a house we’ve never seen before.”

Jane stared at him without a word and grew so pale all at once that her twin, who fondly fancied that he had broken the news in a truly tactful manner, was startled.

“Oh, say, don’t look so white. Sit down here, or—or do something,” and before she knew what

“Mrs. Janes”

was happening he had deposited her on the couch and was waving a feather duster under her nose.

“Oo-ouch! Take that horrid thing away,” spluttered Jane, scrambling to her feet, and searching wildly in her apron pocket for a handkerchief. “At-choo! At-choo!”

“I forgot it was dusty. And I’d heard something about feathers when people fainted.”

“I’m not going to faint. I never did in my life. And now tell me this minute. Has mother got to sell this house?”

“Yes. And she’s got a good offer for it already, and the man wants it soon,” replied David, piling up the bad tidings now that the ice was so effectually broken.

“Oh, dear,” said Jane with a sigh that fairly hurt. “And is everything decided—about the bank, I mean?”

“Yes. It’ll be a long time before mother gets her money, if ever she does get it. We’ll have to move into a small house, of course. Mother said the other day that perhaps she could give piano lessons and help out that way.”

“Oh, Spinksy, a little house, probably on a side street, and mother giving lessons! I shall hate it!”

“Well, you don’t suppose mother likes it, do you?” David’s manner was severe, and his sister

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blinked. "You can't think it's going to be any picnic for her, but she's terribly brave. I tell you, Janesy, it's up to us, because we're the oldest, to buck up and take what's coming to us. You've been a trump so far whenever you've talked to mother, so don't lower your batting average."

"I won't. Is she in her room now?" answered Jane with unexpected meekness.

"She was a few minutes ago. She has a letter she wants to talk over with us. I thought I'd tell you about the house so you could screw your courage up before you saw mother."

"Come on then before I lose what I have. Actually, when I think about being poor I'm a—I'm a regular jelly-fish."

"Nonsense! We've never been very rich, and we're not going to be the poorest poor now. Anyway, what's the use of jelly-fishing?"

"Well, it isn't so bad for boys. You don't care whether your clothes are in style or not. Dear me, it does seem as if there might be some one to help us out. 'Most any one else would have a perfectly good grandfather, or a dreadfully rich uncle. Even an aunt—— Why, Spinsky Stuart, not one of us has thought of mother's Aunt Caroline, the one who named me for her sister."

Jane's eyes were sparkling, and she shook her brother with all the strength tennis and gymnas-

“Mrs. Janes”

tics had put into her arms. “You don’t seem a bit excited, Davy, and I think that’s a perfectly gorgeous idea. To be sure,” she went on more slowly, “Aunt Caroline’s never taken the least notice of me except to send me a silver cup, and I don’t believe she and mother have written to each other for years, but then ——”

“She got angry with father about something when you and I were babies,” interrupted David. “Mother couldn’t ask her for help.”

“Oh, I suppose not. It’s only another one of my brilliant ideas gone wrong. I wish they hadn’t let her name me. I believe I’ll think up some name I really do like, and insist on being called by it.”

“Don’t. Jane suits me. I’d have to find another nickname for you if you did, and I like ‘Mrs. Janes.’”

“I never could understand why you insisted on calling me after that funny old Mrs. Janes who talked a blue streak, and was sweet as sugar one minute and ready to snap your head off the next,” complained Jane, trying to look like a martyr.

“I can’t imagine,” chuckled David. “Every one else thinks I use it because it’s like Jane, and if you don’t tell I never shall.”

“I suppose I do talk a good deal,” his sister went on with the air of one who yearns for contra-

Jane Stuart, Twin

diction, "and I am temperry pretty often. I think it was unselfish in me, though, to let you have all the good points. I could use some of 'em very well."

She waited hopefully for a second, but David only smiled at her provokingly.

"Goodness gracious, Spinksy, you don't know your part at all. And here we are talking nonsense just as if something dreadful hadn't happened to us. Actually, for one minute I forgot ——"

She interrupted herself with a little shiver. "Come on, let's find mother. I'm going to try to be a child-wonder for goodness. And, Davy, if you see me slumping just cough or scowl."

Mrs. Stuart was in the lower hall saying good-bye to some one as the twins went toward her room. David kept straight on, but his sister lingered a little to find out if she knew the voice of her mother's caller.

"It's so fortunate, dear Mrs. Stuart, that you have such lovely children," the lady was saying. Jane recognized the voice at once. It was the mother of one of her own chums. It was against the Stuart code to listen when people didn't know you were there, but Jane couldn't help hearing the next words as she sauntered toward the window.

“Mrs. Janes”

“We think David is remarkable,” the clear, high-pitched voice went on, “so steady and helpful and responsible. Quite two or three years beyond his age, my husband says. And Jane is such a darling butterfly girl. A perfect child still; doesn’t seem to realize ——”

“Oh, don’t I?” remarked Jane to herself, wrestling with the desire to say it aloud. “I hope mother doesn’t think I’m such a useless ——”

And just then mother’s voice floated up to her, sweet and calm as ever. “Jane’s light-heartedness is a great help to us all,” she said, “and we always feel sure of her when we most need her.”

Jane blew a kiss motherward, scowled out of the hall window at the back of the departing guest, and then went to the head of the stairs.

“Tired, little mumsey?” she asked, putting her arm around her mother’s waist and escorting her into the room where David was waiting for them.

“A little. Has David told you about ——?” Mrs. Stuart stopped uncertainly and surveyed her daughter with some anxiety.

“Oh, yes, he has.” Jane’s voice was heroically gay in her effort to prove that she could be depended upon to take things the right way. “And it won’t matter, will it, about leaving this house after——after we’ve got used to the idea.” An involuntary shiver made her stop for an instant and swallow a

Jane Stuart, Twin

lump in her throat. Then she went on with her eyes fixed on her mother's dear twinkly smile.

"Of course we couldn't afford to keep up a big house—like this, but there are quantities of perfectly dear little houses on some of the side streets, and —— David Stuart, what are you smiling at? Mother, please make him stop laughing at me. He makes me feel foolish."

But instead of stopping David, mother smiled at them both. "You don't know what it means to me," she said happily, "to have two dear, big children who are so anxious to make things easy for me. And now I'm going to tell you about a letter I received day before yesterday. I haven't mentioned it until now because I wanted to think it over first. It's a letter from my Aunt Caroline."

Jane glanced at her twin in a little flutter of excitement. Here was the wealthy relative for whom she had been yearning. She hoped David would remember that she had thought of the possibility of this.

"I'm sure I've told you that Aunt Caroline came back to her father's house in Belhaven when she was a young widow with a little boy, and she and Aunt Jane took care of me when I went there to live," explained Mrs. Stuart. "Aunt Caroline liked to manage the whole family, and she never

“Mrs. Janes”

had quite the same affection for me after I insisted upon marrying your father, who wasn't her choice at all.”

“I don't see why she had anything to say about it,” protested Jane hotly.

“Well, I was only twenty, and she had kept me pretty much a little girl and under her influence,” mother answered thoughtfully. “Naturally your father didn't care much for her, and after a while they quarreled. I won't try to tell you about that. It all seems unnecessary when I look back on it, but Aunt Caroline would persist in trying to arrange our affairs for us, and, of course, your father couldn't stand that.”

“I should say not,” Jane agreed in her decided way. “I can't bear managing persons.”

“You would love some things about her very much,” Mrs. Stuart hastened to say. “When I was a little girl I thought there was no one like her.”

“What became of the little boy you said she had?” inquired David.

His mother's face clouded. “The little boy was my cousin Donald, about three years older than I. When he grew up he fell in love with a beautiful Italian girl, the daughter of a man from whom he took singing lessons, and married her, much against his mother's wishes. They went out to the Pacific

Jane Stuart, Twin

Coast, and Aunt Caroline cherished her anger against Donald for a year. Then, just as she was making up her mind to write to him, she had news of his death."

"Whew!" David gave a long-drawn whistle. "I didn't know we had so much tragedy in our family."

"And didn't Aunt Caroline do anything for the poor pretty wife?" demanded Jane, much interested in the romance which had come to such an untimely end.

"She was very ill after she learned about her son, but as soon as she was able she made every inquiry, only to find that Donald's wife had died not long after he did, and had given her baby to some woman who had been kind to her. Aunt Caroline never could trace the woman, though she tried for a long time."

"How perfectly thrilling! Just think, I may have a forty-second cousin roaming around the world somewhere," said Jane excitedly. "I wish I had. It's rather dreadful having your father and mother only children. Was she a boy, mother? I mean was he a girl?"

David laughed. He always enjoyed himself when his twin got excited and talked ragtime, as Kenneth called it.

"It was a little girl, I suppose. Aunt Caroline

“Mrs. Janes”

seemed to take it for granted that the baby would be named for her, because she always spoke of it as ‘little Caroline.’ ”

“Would she be just about our age? Older, I suppose. Spinksy, when we’re grown up let’s go out to the Pacific Coast, and find her and bring her back to Aunt Caroline. Perhaps if we do she’ll fall on our necks, give us each a comfortable fortune, and not try to manage our affairs.”

Jane giggled over her own romancing. She could quite see herself restoring the lost child to its sorrowing grandmother. Suddenly these visions deserted her, and she became conscious that she was even more interested in future possibilities than in past events. “Is Aunt Caroline’s letter a nice one, mother?” she inquired anxiously.

“A very kind letter.” Mrs. Stuart was secretly hoping that her manner didn’t betray the fact that certain things in it had been hard for her to read. It wouldn’t have been Aunt Caroline if she hadn’t hinted that present happenings were the result of failure to heed the advice she had so freely given.

“Aunt Caroline says that her husband—I forgot to tell you that she was married again about five years ago to a Mr. Stephen Eliot—saw the account of the bank failure in the paper, and my name among the list of stockholders.”

Jane Stuart, Twin

Mrs. Stuart was unfolding the letter as she spoke, and glancing rapidly through it.

“ ‘I’m very sorry not to be able to help you with money,’ ” she read aloud, “ ‘but times have been hard, and I feel that I cannot with justice to my own family be too generous to others.’ ”

“I don’t believe her husband will let her do anything,” declared Jane positively. “I don’t like that man a bit.”

Mrs. Stuart smiled. “It will be something new if Aunt Caroline takes any advice in regard to the management of her money.”

“Is she your own aunt, mother?” inquired Jane. “I’ve forgotten.”

“No. My father was her stepbrother. It was only a connection by marriage, you see, but she was always just as nice to me as an own aunt could have been while she had the entire control of my life.”

“Oh,” Jane answered with a volume of meaning in the one little word.

“Please read some more, mother,” begged David.

“You know, however, that my heart is always open to the call of kinship,” the letter went on, “and I’m more than willing to let bygones be bygones, and give you what help I can. If you and your family would like to live in the old house at Belhaven, you may have it for an indef-

“Mrs. Janes”

inite time rent-free. You would find it in good condition, as there has always been a caretaker there since I left it, and your Uncle Stephen has been back from time to time to see that everything is all right. There have been some changes in it since you saw it last, but it is adequately furnished, and you wouldn't need to bother with bringing your own furniture.”

“Is that all?” questioned Jane in a suppressed voice.

“Yes, practically all,” answered her mother, wondering what the child could have expected that she should look so disappointed.

“Oh, dear, oh, dear! I thought it would be such a nice chance for her to say, ‘Now, my dear niece, don't worry, and don't think of selling your house, for I will send you a thousand-dollar check every once in a while,’” said Jane absurdly. “Now I suppose she'll be angry, and never speak to you again when you write her that of course we can't accept her exceedingly generous offer.” The sarcastic manner in which her young niece emphasized the last words would have surprised Aunt Caroline could she have heard it.

“Jane, I don't like your spirit at all,” said mother with a decision which fairly startled her daughter. “We are not asking our friends for help, and we don't measure their kindness by its amount, nor

Jane Stuart, Twin

by the way it fits in with our especial desires. It means a great deal to me in a time of trouble like this to have Aunt Caroline think of me in such a friendly way, and I have by no means decided to refuse her offer of help."

Ordinarily Jane would have been apologetic after a rebuke so deserved as she really knew this to be, but the appalling idea conveyed in the last announcement filled her mind utterly.

"Why, mother—why, mother," Jane's gray eyes were growing big and dark, and her breath came quickly, "do you really mean that you would leave a perfectly beautiful city like Sterling, where we've been born and brought up, to go to that little seashore town? Why, you forget that David and I are going to graduate this year, and that I'm to have an important part in the May celebration, and ——" she stopped suddenly, realizing that she was laying down the law in a way that even the most patient mother might feel inclined to resent.

"The letter came day before yesterday, Janey," said her mother with a note of finality in her voice. "It hasn't been out of my mind a minute since. It seems almost providential to have it come just as it is settled that we must leave this house by the last of April."

"But, mother, you don't seem to understand," protested Jane, trying to make her voice sound

“Mrs. Janes”

calm and reasonable. “Of course I know we must give up this house, but why need we go away from the city? Changing schools is bad for us, isn’t it, Spinksy, and there is a part in the graduation play for me, and I did so want to be queen.”

She looked appealingly at her twin, but David only coughed and frowned, a performance which at the same time reminded her of her previous request and filled her with exasperation. David had so much influence with mother. Why couldn’t he try to persuade her to stay in Sterling? There were moments when Jane was tempted to think her twin too good.

Suddenly an illuminating idea struck her, and hope once more found a place in her eyes.

“If you should—if you should decide to do anything so dreadful as leaving Sterling,” she said with a little quiver in her voice, “why couldn’t I stay here until after school closes and then go to Belhaven. Mabel Haynes would just love to have me stay with her.”

“I’m sure she would,” agreed mother, but for some reason a sudden color flew into her cheeks, and there was a hurt look in the brown eyes. “But if we go, and I really do feel that it will be best for us to accept this offer, I shouldn’t feel happy to leave my girl here—and I shall need her.”

Jane Stuart, Twin

Jane got up from her chair, startled, unhappy, rebellious.

“Oh, I can’t stand it,” she wailed, starting toward the door, and almost blinded by tears. “I love every stick and stone and person in Sterling. I can’t bear the thought of living anywhere else. I shall never be happy again, and I wish Aunt Caroline ——”

The sound of sobs came back to them as she fled through the hall. Then the slam of her chamber door, and the hasty turning of the key.

“Mrs. Janes has shut her door,” remarked David in a matter-of-fact tone. And then, persuasively, “I don’t suppose you could change your mind about letting her stay a while, could you, mother? All that graduation fuss means so much to girls.”

“And I suppose boys don’t count when it comes to leaving school and friends,” said his mother, looking straight into his honest eyes. “Oh, Davy, Davy, you’ve been trying to make everything easy for your twin ever since you were old enough to think at all, and it isn’t fair. You must give her a chance to make some sacrifice. I should love to let her stay, but I really feel we can’t afford it in more ways than one.”

“All right, little mother,” said David hastily. He could stand it when Jane went off into a burst

“Mrs. Janes”

of tears, but to see his mother with quivering lips and moist eyes was almost too much for him. “I’ll go and round up Judy and Ken. It’s getting on toward supper time.”

A half-hour went by, and then David poked his head through the doorway again. “Not here yet?” he questioned, gazing around the room disappointedly. “Poor old Mrs. Janes! I knocked on her door when I went down, but she wouldn’t answer. Don’t you worry about Jane, though, mother, because underneath everything ——”

The last word ended in a gasp and a frantic effort to keep his balance, for Jane coming on the run from her room had attempted to occupy the same place in the doorway which her twin was filling.

“Don’t trouble about apologizing to my mother for me, Mr. Spinksy Stuart,” she said with an attempt at the gay audacity which characterized her. “Please run out and shut the door, that’s a good boy.”

And then in a flash she was across the room, and, as though she were a small child again, had curled herself as snugly as possible in her mother’s lap. Her eyes and nose were red and swollen, and fallen locks of hair were straggling about her face.

“Mother, darling, am I crushing you?” she

Jane Stuart, Twin

asked. "I just couldn't get here fast enough when I remembered what you said to Mrs. Bruce this afternoon: that I could always be depended on when you most needed me. Oh, mother! It seemed a mile from my room here when I thought—of that."

Tears came again in sudden shower, but this time mother's tender arms were around her daughter, and she was murmuring comforting words in her dear, soothing way.

"Mumsey, I'm so sorry," Jane said at last, choking back the tears heroically. "I meant to be so—so helpful. And I forgot all about 'Stuart obliges.'"

"What under the sun is that?"

"Oh, didn't we tell you? Well, we will some day. It's something like medicine; doesn't do you any good if you forget to take it," ended Jane limply.

"Let me tell you, darling, why I think it will be better for us to go to Belhaven, and why I can't say yes to that plan of yours," said mother gently.

Jane listened intently, her eyes growing very thoughtful, as mother talked to her quite as if she were an older person, and asked her opinion about plans.

"You see, Janey, we shall have a small income left in spite of the bank failure, and the sale of the

“Mrs. Janes”

house will help out a great deal. But we shall have to be very economical, and it will mean so much not to be obliged to pay rent.”

Mother was silent for a moment ; then she went on cheerfully. “Mr. Walker says that he will send on the examinations, and you and David may have your diplomas if you keep up work with me. Of course I know that isn’t so pleasant as being here with your class, but it will be less expensive, I’m sure. Besides, I don’t want to go away and leave my daughter. I need her so much just now.”

There was a wistful appeal in the dear voice which made Jane search wildly for her moist ball of a handkerchief, and try hard for self-control. Then, slipping out of her mother’s lap, she knelt before her and looked up with penitent eyes. “Mother, dearest, when you talk to me like that I don’t care for school, or being queen, or having to leave Sterling, or—or anything,” she declared impressively. “I even think I shall love being in Belhaven.”

She started to her feet at the sound of the children coming up-stairs, but lingered an instant to say with an uncontrollable shudder, “There’s just one thing I draw the line at.”

“What is it, dear?”

In Jane’s wet eyes was the suspicion of a twinkle ;

Jane Stuart, Twin

around her mouth the hint of a smile, but her manner was solemn even to mournfulness.

“I draw the line at finding—at finding any more rich relatives,” she said suddenly, and fled from the room.

CHAPTER III

FROZEN TEARS

“ I’m going to be a shuffer,” announced Kenneth in a clear, decided voice. “ Mr. Downing’s George says I can polish things ’most as well as he can already, and now that we’re poor ——”

The roar of a passing train blotted out the words that followed, and Jane looked frowningly across the car at her young brother, wondering what family news he was imparting to the stout lady who occupied the seat with him.

The previous two nights and a day had been spent in Boston with a friend of Mrs. Stuart, and this was the last stage of the journey to Belhaven. The train was crowded, and there had been difficulty in finding seats together, so Kenneth, who delighted in making acquaintance with strangers, had firmly insisted that David should share the seat with Jane. Mrs. Stuart and Judy, who always had a headache on the train, were several seats ahead of the others.

“ Did you hear what Ken just said ? ” asked Jane, nudging her twin, who was absorbed in a book. “ He ought not to be allowed to tell our whole

Jane Stuart, Twin

family history to strangers. That woman looks as amused as anything."

"Uh-huh," murmured David amiably, not in the least taking in what she was saying, and visibly plunging with renewed interest into the book which had been given him when they left Sterling.

At sight of it Jane's mind pictured once more the last half-hour in the big station. She could see the echoing train-house plainly, and the hurrying people who didn't know and didn't care that the Stuart family was departing, perhaps forever. To say those last two words even in her own mind gave Jane a feeling of chill depression. It was pleasanter to think of the eager throng of boys and girls who had come to see them off.

It was quite the fashion in Sterling to say a last good-bye at the station, and she would have been hurt if her friends had not come. It was no small test of her self-control, however, to try to joke and be gay up to the very last moment; particularly when one of the girls slipped a package into her hand and said, "We couldn't have you for our queen, Lady Jane, so we've given you something to remind you of it. You'll find our frozen tears there."

She had opened it as soon as they were fairly settled on the train to discover a dainty box en-

Frozen Tears

closing a small gold brooch in the shape of a crown. An exceedingly tiny diamond winked at her from one of the points. "That must be the frozen tears," she had said, pointing out the minute, sparkling stone to her admiring family. "Wasn't it clever of them to call it that? I shall never know such nice girls again." Then, conscious of the shadow that flitted across her mother's expressive face, she had added hastily, "At least, I suppose there'll be just as nice girls in Belhaven, only I don't know them yet." Jane had truly tried to be very tender of mother's feelings lately.

This afternoon she pulled herself back to the present moment with a conscious effort, and looked with a critical eye at the flat, uninteresting marshland through which the train was hurrying.

"I hope Belhaven doesn't look like this," she said with a little shiver, and then, because her absorbed brother didn't even hear her, she got up and went where mother was sitting, and perched on the arm of the seat. Judy was asleep with her head against mother's shoulder and didn't even stir when her sister spoke.

"I suppose it looks something like home to you, mumsey," Jane murmured a little wistfully.

"Even the landscape changes in sixteen years, Janey. And I never knew this part of it except from the train. Belhaven is entirely different."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Oh, I'm so glad." Jane's relief was so unmistakable that Mrs. Stuart couldn't help smiling.

"It isn't going to be so bad as you think it is, darling," she said reassuringly. "You may even like it in time."

"I know you're laughing at me inside because I'm so tragic over it," Jane answered seriously, "but you can't leave your beloved home city ——" she broke off suddenly, and stared out of the car window with very sober eyes.

"Please tell me about Aunt Caroline, mother," she went on softly after a moment. "I've been trying to imagine how she looks, and I can't think of anything but a tall, pale, thin person with blue eyes."

"You couldn't be more out of the way," laughed Mrs. Stuart. "I dare say you're thinking of her as a very old lady, too, but she isn't. She's small and dainty, with sparkling black eyes and a lovely color in her cheeks. She was always beautifully dressed, and really rather pretty."

"She sounds attractive. I begin to think I shall like her. Do you suppose she's dreadfully sad all the time because her son died and she can't find her grandchild?"

"She loved poor Donald very much, and she was heart-broken when she lost him," answered mother slowly. "But Aunt Caroline used to be a

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very gay and cheerful sort of person who loved good times and society, and I can't help thinking of her in that way now. She was always especially fond of girls, and I'm quite sure you'll like her. I suppose she's never really given up the hope that she may find Donald's child some day. I dare say she investigates every possible clue."

Jane gazed meditatively into space. "Do you know, it gives me the queerest sort of feeling when I think about it," she murmured, nestling closely against her mother. "Just imagine; some day I might get acquainted with her, and talk to her, and like her, and—oh, everything else—and not have an atom of an idea that she was my cousin. What did you say her name was, mother? Oh, I remember, you said 'little Caroline.'"

"You know we weren't altogether sure whether——" began Mrs. Stuart, but Jane, whose thoughts had been racing as fast as the wheels of the train, broke in eagerly:

"Mumsey, you'll think I'm perfectly foolish to say this, but wouldn't it be blissful if we could find her? It would be so nice to do something for Aunt Caroline, because she's doing a lot for us, isn't she?"

Mother's eyes twinkled, and Jane had to laugh.

"Well, I know I haven't been very nice about it, but 'way down underneath everything I do feel

Jane Stuart, Twin

thankful," she explained hastily. "I truly believe that if it hadn't been for her husband she'd have —— But then we didn't want her to do any more for us, did we? I suppose it's because I remembered all the wonderful rich relatives in story-books that I thought perhaps she would." Jane's tone was apologetic, and she looked distinctly cheered when mother smiled.

"Anyway," she went on absurdly, "I'm going to keep on the lookout for girls who haven't mothers and fathers. 'Miss Jane Stuart, Sleuth,' or Sloth, or some word like that. How do you think that sounds? Truly, mother, wouldn't it be the loveliest thing ever if we could find 'little Caroline'?"

"Janey, your imagination runs away with you just as mine always has," laughed mother. "It certainly would be the 'loveliest thing ever,' but I'm afraid we shall have to be satisfied to show our gratitude in some other way."

"I suppose so." Jane's sigh was from the bottom of her heart. "It would be so much more interesting, though, to do a big, romantic thing than a lot of little ones." She got up from her uncomfortable seat as she ended. "I'm going back and pull Spinksy out of that book," she announced with stern resolution. "He's got to learn to be more sociable."

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As she settled down beside David, Jane became aware again of Kenneth's chatter, which seemed to be vastly entertaining to his attentive companion.

"We're going to live in Belhaven," he was saying. "We're going to have the house my mother lived in when she was a little girl, but I'm afraid it won't be so nice as the one we had in Sterling. Jane says——" And again the increasing clatter of the train prevented his worried sister from hearing how he ended his sentence.

"Spinksy, you must sit up and take notice," she said urgently. "Can't you make Ken stop talking? Nearly all the way from Sterling to Boston he was telling everything he knew to that Mr. Stevens, and he'd never seen him before in his life."

At the mention of Mr. Stevens David came back to a consciousness of his surroundings. "Wasn't he a great old chap?" he demanded with enthusiasm. "I hated to say good-bye to him when we got to Boston. Wish he could have gone to Belhaven, and spent the summer with us."

"So do I. And I can't blame Ken for telling him things, for something made me let out that I wanted to be an artist, and I've never told any one that but you and mother."

"He was mighty interesting when he talked about fishing, and he knew a lot about the country

Jane Stuart, Twin

around Belhaven, because he camped there once," said David, his eyes kindling at the recollection of the stories Mr. Stevens had told.

"He made Judy's head feel better, and mother seemed to like him as much as we did. Kenneth just fell in love with him. He really was a darling, with all that thick white hair, and perfectly sweet blue eyes and rosy cheeks."

"It's a funny thing," commented David thoughtfully, "that we all poured out everything we knew about ourselves, but I can't find out that one of us knows even where he lives."

Jane stared at him blankly. "It looks as though we didn't give him much chance to talk about himself, doesn't it?" she said at last. "What station is this we're coming to now, Spinksy? Oh, there's mother beckoning to you."

"Mother says Belhaven's the next station after this one, and we must get our traps picked up," announced David, coming back to stow his precious book in his bag, and have an eye to the luggage in general. "I'll break up that everlasting story the cub is telling."

Jane looked eagerly about as she got off the train. For the moment it seemed that some familiar face must greet her eye. Instead there was only a dingy station, with the usual hurrying crowd of people arriving and departing.

Frozen Tears

"The street-car will take us within an easy walk of the house," Mrs. Stuart said cheerfully, "but first I must see about having the trunks sent up. Oh, children, don't you begin to smell the delicious salt air? That will make you feel better, Judy."

Kenneth threw back his head joyously to sniff the air, and in his absorption in this new delight walked almost into the arms of a little old man who had been watching them all ever since they left the train.

"Hi, there, young feller, I'm pretty transparient, but you'll have to go 'round 'stid of through," he said with a genial smile which transformed his brown face into a network of creases from which the small dark eyes looked out humorously.

"Never you mind. There ain't nothin' hurt, not even my feelin's," he went on as Kenneth offered a handsome apology for his inattention. "When a chap's engaged in takin' in the ozone to that extent he ain't really responsible for his foot-action. But p'raps you can tell me if you've seen anything of the Stuart family 'round here."

This was so unexpected that Kenneth stared at him dumbly for an instant. Then he said quickly, "Why, I am—we are—this is the Stuart family. That's my mother, and David, and my sister ——"

Jane Stuart, Twin

“Beats all how quick I am 'bout knowin' folks,” interrupted the man, taking off his weather-beaten hat and approaching Mrs. Stuart. “P'raps you don't remember Mr. Chope, Mis' Stuart? Used to work for your grandfather when you lived here.”

“Why, Mr. Chope, how could I possibly forget any one who was always so good to me?” Mrs. Stuart put out her hand with a cordiality which brought forth another of the astonishing smiles. “It is so pleasant to be met by some one I used to know.”

“Yes'm. I'm still on the old place. And when we heard you was comin' to-day, I said right off I'd be here with the kerridge. Now if you'll give me your checks, Mis' Stuart, I'll see about gittin' your baggage hauled.”

As he walked off with the checks, Mrs. Stuart turned to Jane and David. “How did he know we were coming to-day?” she questioned perplexedly. “I can't remember writing Aunt Caroline anything about it.”

“Well, you probably did,” answered Jane. “I think it was dandy of her to write and tell him. I just know I'm going to like her.”

“Did you always have to say Mr. Chope, mother?” asked David softly. “Didn't any one call him by his first name?”



“ BEATS ALL HOW QUICK I AM ”

Frozen Tears

“Not even Aunt Caroline,” laughed his mother. “I can’t remember ever hearing any other name. It would never have occurred to me that he could still be here.”

“I’m pretty spry yet, you see, Mis’ Stuart,” said Mr. Chope, coming up at that moment, and walking off again with as many bags as he could manage. “You stay jest there till the up train to Boston gits out of the way. She’s due now,” he called back over his shoulder.

Almost directly there was the rush and roar of a train, the grinding of brakes as it slackened speed, the hot breath of the engine on their faces. The children gazed with interest at passengers getting off and on.

Suddenly Kenneth uttered an exclamation of joyful surprise and darted in the direction of a forward car. He did not get far, however, for at the sound of his mother’s cry of alarm, David was after him in a second, and brought him back spluttering and indignant.

“Wha-wha-what made you stop me?” he stammered, twisting himself out of his brother’s relaxing grasp as the train slowly puffed away from the station. “I was going to speak to him, and now most likely I shall never see him again.”

There was such real distress in his voice that they all looked at him in surprise.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Who was it you thought you saw, son?" asked his mother with her arm about him.

"It was Mr. Stevens. He came out of the station and got on the train quick as a flash."

"Oh, Ken, Mr. Stevens is miles away from here," protested David.

"Kenneth is always seeing people he thinks he knows," said Judy. "He pointed out some one from Sterling in almost every station we stopped at, and to me it never looked the least bit like the one he said it was."

"I don't care if I did. This was Mr. Stevens. He had white hair and a gray suit, and ——"

"Might 'a' been Dr. Hall," interrupted Mr. Chope, who had come up unperceived. "He has white hair and a gray suit. There ain't any Mr. Stevens residin', so to speak, in these parts that I know of." His funny twinkling eyes were laughing, though his mouth was quite sober. "Come on, sonny. You and me'll show that big brother of yours how to drive a fast horse."

"Isn't this nice?" Jane said happily as they jogged along in the comfortable old carriage. For the time being she had forgotten the sorrow of parting with her friends, and the joy of novelty was strong upon her. All the spring-time spirit of adventure rose in her heart as they drove by old-fashioned houses, and caught glimpses of tree-

Frozen Tears

lined streets which wandered out of sight in inviting curves.

"Spinksy, we'll follow along every one of these fascinating streets and see where they go, won't we?" she asked, tapping her twin on the shoulder to attract his attention. "I'm just pining to knock on some one's door with one of those lovely brass knockers. I feel just as if George Washington or—or Paul Revere would answer if I did."

There was a convulsive motion of Mr. Chope's shoulders which seemed to indicate that his face had cracked into one of its expansive smiles. "George Washington and Paul Revere ain't been tendin' door here very regular lately," he said with a chuckle, "but there's some mighty nice folks behind some of them knockers, just the same."

"That's fine," responded Kenneth, after a pause which had fallen uncomfortably on his sensitive soul. Personally he was absorbed in taking in everybody and everything that came within the range of his acute gaze, but he didn't want his new friend to feel that his conversation was unappreciated.

"Mother, it looks as if these gardens will be perfect beauties," said David, noting the neat paths, the well-kept shrubbery and the fountain in the one they were just passing.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Belhaven was always famous for its lovely gardens," Mrs. Stuart responded with pride. "I don't know whether Aunt Caroline's garden has been kept up, but I hope so, because you'll all love it so much."

"It has, ma'am, it has," Mr. Chope assured them solemnly. "I hev done it with my own hands. Jest now there ain't nothin' much in the way of bloom, but everythin' is promisin' to put in its best licks by and by."

"Do you live at Aunt Caroline's house?" demanded Judy suddenly.

"Why, not exactly, so to speak, at her house. My apartment is in the barn."

"And does this horse live there, too?"

"Yes, Sally ockipies the ground-floor." Mr. Chope's small eyes were almost shut, so greatly was he amused over these answers.

"And is there a cat, and have you a dog?" Judy went on with breathless interest.

Mr. Chope looked puzzled for an instant, then shut his jaw with a snap. "I ain't goin' to tell you anythin' more," he said decidedly. "We're most there, and I've got to drive up to the house like a born and bred coachman or Miss Trot'll give me hickey-dick."

He squared his shoulders, which were much too broad for his height, made himself look as tall and

Frozen Tears

straight as possible, and took a fresh grip on the sedate old horse, which, needing no guidance, rather resented this liberty.

“Does this do the trick?” he said in a confidential aside to Kenneth. The latter’s unqualified assent seeming to give him supreme satisfaction, he turned the next corner with a genteel flourish, and in another moment drew up in front of an old-fashioned square house which gleamed whitely in the May sunshine.

“Does it look as you thought it would, mother?” asked David, jumping out in a hurry and standing ready to help the others.

“Yes—and no ——” began Mrs. Stuart slowly, but before she could explain she was interrupted by a shriek from Judy, who had run up the front walk ahead of the others.

No one could tell whether it was joy or grief until they saw that she was cuddling a gray kitten which, almost hidden by a large pink bow, had been sitting on the steps washing its tiny paws. From its neck was suspended a card, on which something was written.

“‘My name is Fluff,’” Judy read slowly. “‘I belong to Judy Stuart.’ Why, mother, did you ever see anything so cunning? Who gave her to me, do you suppose?”

Before any one could answer, the front door

Jane Stuart, Twin

opened suddenly, and a young girl, with dark hair done up in curl papers all over her head, backed slowly out, tugging at a cord to which something unwilling was attached. She was quite oblivious of the fact that the group of strangers had almost reached the steps. She knew only the necessity of the moment which demanded that the stubborn puppy at the end of the string, bracing four determined paws on the hall floor, should be dragged out on the steps before he could have time to chew up the fifth placard which she had laboriously made for him.

For an instant every one was politely silent watching the struggle. Mr. Chope, laden with bags, stood shaking with laughter. At last the situation was too much for Kenneth, and his cheerful giggle rang out uncontrollably.

At the sound the girl turned sharply, dropping the string in her dismay, and faced them all with flaming cheeks. Involuntarily her hand sought the rampant curl papers, she opened her mouth as if she were about to speak, but shut it again helplessly. Then, catching sight of Mr. Chope, bent double now in his ecstasy of amusement, she fled into the house without a word.

The small Irish terrier, meanwhile, was making wild dashes at the feet of the children, leaping fiercely at the kitten in Judy's arms, and between

Frozen Tears

attacks worrying the card which hung around his neck.

David caught and held him firmly. "Here, you young rascal, let me see who you are," he said peremptorily. "I'm Rags. I'm Kenneth Stuart's dog," the straggling letters read. "Here, Ken, take him; he's yours. What do you suppose we draw, Jane? Elephants or camels?"

"But who—who gives them to us?" demanded Kenneth, hugging his new pet lovingly. "I s'pose it's Aunt Caroline, of course, but how could she know that I wanted a dog more than anything else?"

"And that I just love kittens," Judy added.

"All boys want dogs and all girls like kittens," observed Jane wisely. "But who was the girl, Mr. Chope?"

The old man laughed, and in the process shut his eyes so tightly that Jane wondered if he could see at all.

"Mis' Simms, the caretaker, hired her about a week ago," he explained, "and then bein' sent for sudden she had to go off this mornin' and leave her in charge. Which wasn't a real misfortin', becuz she's the smartest thing that ever lit in these parts, if she has got some queer notions. Her name is Trot, Susan Trot. She's been at me for two mortal days," Mr. Chope interrupted himself

Jane Stuart, Twin

to shake with silent laughter again, "to git me to buck up and meet you in style, and now—they curlin' papers. It's likely she miscalculated the time. She won't never git over it to her dyin' day."

"Poor little girl," said Mrs. Stuart, who was somewhat excited over getting back to her old home, and not a little surprised to find a household provided for her. "Be sure you don't say anything, children, to make her feel uncomfortable about it. It's very nice to find some one who's ambitious to have things right."

"David, you and Jane take some of the bags up-stairs," she continued as they all stepped into the hall. "And, Kenneth, perhaps Mr. Chope can find a place in the barn for Rags while we are getting ready for supper."

"Sure, Mis' Stuart," answered Mr. Chope, departing with a knowing wink at Kenneth which caused that delighted youth to pursue him as fast as Rags would permit.

David picked Judy out of the maze of string with which the puppy had encircled her, and then followed Jane, who was already half-way up-stairs.

"Shall I leave kitty on the porch, mother?" asked Judy, who could hear Jane and David talking excitedly and wanted to know what it was all about. "Do you s'pose she'll run away?"

Frozen Tears

“No'm, he won't,” asserted a decided voice, as Susan Trot appeared from the back of the house, much flushed after her rapid hair-dressing. Her dark eyes were shining, and the short unruly curls, protruding at all angles, were kept in a semblance of order by a stiff red ribbon. “I buttered his paws and gave him some milk, and he's as contented as anything.”

“So this is Susan,” said Mrs. Stuart with her kind smile. “Mr. Chope tells me that you're going to help us about the work. You don't look very old, child.”

“Yes'm—no'm—I mean I know how to do a lot, and I'm sixteen—goin' on seventeen,” responded Susan incoherently. She was stirred to the depths of her being by the friendliness of Mrs. Stuart's manner. It seemed to her she had never seen any one so sweet—so motherly. “Think of bein' able to call her ‘ma,’” she was saying over and over in her mind.

“Well, Susan, we'll get rid of some of this travel dust, and then we'll help get supper.”

“There's no need of any help. Supper'll be ready any time you say. Jest give me five minutes' warnin'. I don't want you should li't——”

The girl's gaze wandered to the head of the stairs and she stopped speaking involuntarily at the sight and sound of Jane, who was stand-

Jane Stuart, Twin

ing where the afternoon sunshine fell full upon her.

“Mother Stuart, aren’t you almost ready to come up-stairs?” she called excitedly. “There’s a note—I think it’s from Aunt Caroline, but it isn’t signed. Anyway it is directed to me, and says I’m to have the blue room that Aunt Jane used to have. And Spinksy has found a fishing-rod—a perfect beauty; and there’s a sketch-book for me; and Aunt Caroline hopes we’ll all like everything. I think she’s a perfect dear—and do come up now, mother.”

Susan Trot’s rapt gaze was riveted on the vanishing Jane as Mrs. Stuart and Judy went up the stairs. “My! Ain’t she just like one of them Christmas-card angels!” she murmured in an awestruck tone. Then, when her rapid step had taken her back to the kitchen, her eager thoughts once more found words. “This is certingly an intrestin’ fam’ly to live with,” she remarked, determination written in her gaze. “I’m goin’ to work—glory, I’m goin’ to work so hard they can’t get along without me.”

CHAPTER IV

SUSAN TROT

“ATTENTION, company!” said Mrs. Stuart with so military an accent that all four children sat up straighter than usual and surveyed her with flattering interest. It was the morning after their arrival in Belhaven, and they were still lingering at the table where appetite and breakfast had met in the happiest manner.

“I’m going to make you a present of this day,” mother went on with her cheeriest smile, “because I know that you can’t possibly settle down to a regular life until you’ve found out all you can about this house and garden and neighborhood. To-morrow we shall begin on lessons, and you are all to have regular duties about the house.”

“May we do just what we like to-day?” questioned Kenneth, his face agleam with wonderful possibilities.

“If there’s anything you’re doubtful about you may consult your commanding officer, or Lieutenant David Stuart. Jane and David must unpack their trunks and settle their belongings,

Jane Stuart, Twin

but they may do it when they please, provided it is finished by bedtime. Ken is to find a place, under my supervision, for his particular treasures, and put them away when I come to them in my unpacking. Judy"—mother paused in her commands to put her arm around Judy, who sat next to her—"Judy must put away some of her belongings, too, but most of all she is to stay out-of-doors, and run around in this glorious sunshine."

"Come out to the barn this minute and see Rags, Judy," invited Kenneth, jumping up from the table. "I'll beat you to it."

It was a morning of blue sky and dazzling sunshine, with a tricky breeze that blew off caps, and ruffled hair. Jane, standing on the front piazza trying to decide what she should do first, felt almost as if some insistent comrade were calling her to come out and be gay.

"It's just as well for me that you are only a breeze and not a girl," she said to herself, and with the thought her eyes explored the neighborhood. Houses were not near together in this part of the town. There were vacant lots on both sides of Aunt Caroline's land. Along to the right on the opposite side of the street an old-fashioned yellow house stood somewhat back from the sidewalk. At about an equal distance to the left was a wall surrounding a thick growth of trees in the midst of

Susan Trot

which Jane fancied she could see the gleam of a red roof.

"Now is there a girl in either of those houses?" Jane asked herself anxiously. She had almost made up her mind to walk up the street toward the hidden house when David came flying in from the barn, whistling joyously.

"Do come up the street with me a little way, Spinksy," she implored. "I want to see if I can catch a glimpse of a girl anywhere."

"I can't now. I'm going to unpack first, and get things out of the way."

David's cheerful decision was not to be shaken, as his twin knew, but that didn't in the least prevent her from trying again.

"Just come with me now, and I'll help you about your unpacking later."

"Oh, thank you just the same, Mrs. Janes." David's manner was really over-polite. "My gracious, girl, you've got enough to do with all your fiddle-faddles to put away. Why don't you get busy now, and we'll explore later."

"Dear me! Why are you always so sensible?" sighed Jane. "I s'pose, though, you're right, and I'm wrong, as you usually are, and I'll race you on unpack——" she was in the house and up the stairs without waiting to finish the word, and David followed with a chuckle. His twin's lightning

Jane Stuart, Twin

changes of mood were a source of constant delight to him.

As might be expected, Jane's enthusiasm for unpacking didn't last long, and by the time she had opened all the drawers in bureau and dressing-table and closet, and had disposed of the contents of one trunk-tray, she found the prospect from her window too inviting to be longer resisted.

"That's why mother said it would do if we got it done any time before night," she thought, forgiving herself at once for her weakness of purpose. "She would hate to have me miss all this beautiful sunshine, and I'll be back in a few minutes, anyway."

She stole down the stairs, fearing that David would hear her, and by some one of his many ingenious methods recall her to duty. On her way to the sidewalk she stopped, realizing all at once that undoubtedly Mr. Chope could tell her who lived in the two houses which had interested her. Turning toward the barn, she could see him polishing Sally's coat with great energy.

"Yes, there's a girl in that house that's hidin' amongst the trees," the old man said, in answer to her first question. Then at sight of Jane's look of rapture, he added hastily, "but the family ain't got here yit. They don't live here winters."

Susan Trot

"Oh, dear! How early do they come?"

"Well, not, so to speak, early," was the cautious answer. "Some un did say, though, that they was comin' earlier than ordinary this year, because Mis' Heath ain't well. She's got something very bad, 'nervous prosperity,' I think they called it."

Jane, doing her best not to laugh at Mr. Chope's mistake, quite failed to see the gleam of mischief in his twinkling eyes.

"Is the girl nice?" she demanded anxiously.

"Yes, I guess she's nice enough. I ain't on what you might call intimate terms with the family, but I've seen her often. She's as old as you I should say, only not so big. She's a pretty-looking little thing, but kind of flighty, I guess; here one day and there the next." Mr. Chope shook his head soberly, as though the fault of not remaining in one place counted strongly against a person, and Jane pondered over the subject for an instant without speaking.

"Well, I think I shall like her," she announced cheerfully. "Has she lived here long?"

"They've been coming here 'bout four years, ef I remember right. Hi, there, Sally, stand still! How do you think I'm going to manicure you ef you keep steppin' about all the time? They came here from the Pacific Coast, I b'lieve, when money got plenty with 'em."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"I do hope they'll get here soon." Jane rubbed Sally's nose with a soothing touch as Mr. Chope paused in his labors and straightened his bent back. "I must go now and finish unpacking," she said with a little sigh. "It's such a glorious day it seems wicked to stay indoors."

"It does, certain," agreed the old man, going to the barn door and gazing at the sky. He shook his head soberly after a moment of contemplation. "This day is a weather-breeder, I'm thinkin'. We'll git a rain soon. Somethin' like folks, ain't it? Oftentimes when they're the very pleasantest you have to look out for storms."

"You must know something about me," admitted Jane ruefully. "That's what I do. Oh, I meant to ask you who lives in the yellow house? Are there any girls there?"

"Not a girl. It's a disappointin' old place, ain't it? But there's a boy, and Robert Randall ain't to be sneezed at, I can tell you."

Jane couldn't help laughing at this description. "That will please David," she said, "to have a boy so near. Of course I don't mind 'em, but girls are my joy. Well, good-bye, Mr. Chope. I'm going once around the garden, and then into the house."

Jane walked toward the garden, where shrubs and smooth paths showed the patient work which Mr. Chope had done this spring. There were

Susan Trot

flower-beds where small sticks with neat labels told that promising seeds had been planted, and in one of these, with her mind intent upon the pursuit of food, was a speckled hen.

“Mr. Chope, Mr. Chope, do we keep hens? There’s one scratching up your seeds!” Jane ran back toward the barn, and the old man came to meet her.

“Sho, is that old hen at my seeds again?” he inquired disgustedly. “Our hens are all shut up. I wish you’d shoo her, will you? She belongs in that hen-yard in the next lot. I must speak to ——”

Jane lost his last words, because she had already started on a wild chase after the hen, which, indignant at being disturbed in so peaceful and necessary an occupation, expressed her feelings in loud and agitated squawking.

“Pick her up! Pick her up and drop her over. She won’t hurt you,” urged Mr. Chope excitedly, just as the hen, chased for the second time to the fence which divided the lots, madly eluded her pursuer, and headed straight for the flower-beds again.

Jane, city-bred, had never touched a hen in her life, but she was not to be daunted. For the third time she rounded up her victim, and directed her flight in the proper direction. Then, having al-

Jane Stuart, Twin

most reached the goal she made the effort of her life, clutched the feathery, shrieking thing with both hands, and carried her the rest of the way.

"Now, stay on your own side of the fence," she ordered sternly, giving the offended creature a little toss which sent her into her own domain.

"I don't see what's going to keep her there, though," she said to Mr. Chope, as she turned back toward the house. "Ugh! I hated to touch her. But I didn't mind it so much after I once got her into my hands."

"Hens ain't bad to touch," chuckled Mr. Chope, manifestly delighted over Jane's first venture in poultry. "But they're the interferingest critters. Lots of human natur' 'bout 'em, too; allus wantin' to git where they ain't. This one ought to have her wing clipped so's she can't fly over the fence."

Jane sternly repressed her desire to seek David and tell him what she had learned about their neighbors, and went instead straight to her own room. Indoor work wasn't so bad after all, she cheerfully assured herself, when you could have all the windows open and hear other people working. David's clear whistle floated in through the hall, and from the kitchen below her room came the sound of Susan's singing.

"Miss Trot seems happy," she thought, as she began on her unpacking. All the children had

Susan Trot

been delighted with Mr. Chope's name for the little maid, and, because it seemed to fit her so well, had already begun to use it among themselves.

Jane worked for a long time, or so it seemed to her, and the trunk began to look comfortingly empty.

"There!" she said, closing the bottom bureau drawer with a last satisfied glance at its neatly-arranged contents. "I've pretty nearly finished. I believe I'll take a vacation and do the rest after dinner. I wonder if Davy ——"

A crash of china, which came unmistakably from the room below, interrupted her soliloquy, and she flew down-stairs without stopping to think. Arrived in the kitchen, ruin and despair met her eye, for a platter lay on the floor in fragments, and Miss Trot stood near it twisting her apron in both hands. In a corner of the room, looking on with bright-eyed innocence, sat Rags, a long piece of cord trailing from his collar.

"Oh, that's too bad, but you couldn't help it, of course," cried Jane, who was always quick to sympathize with any one's distress. "Did you hurt yourself?" she added, not understanding the convulsive wringing of the apron which the girl kept up with increasing force.

For an instant Miss Trot seemed not to be able

Jane Stuart, Twin

to answer, and Jane watched the fiery color flame in her cheeks. At last tears softened the black eyes, and the girl gave a little sigh of relief and dropped the apron.

"'Twas the dog got under my feet," she explained in a choked voice. "I was afraid I should do something to him before I could hold my temper. Miss Clara, a teacher I had once, said I was to count, or pull my own hair, or twist my apron, till I could see straight again. And, oh, I'm so sorry about the platter. I haven't broken a thing before." She was down on her knees by this time picking up the pieces and trying mechanically to fit them together. Rags, realizing apparently that something was wrong, wriggled across the room to her, flattening his body to the floor, and asking forgiveness with his quivering, apologetic tail.

Susan's hand went out to him instinctively. "You didn't mean to do anything, did you, puppy?" she said. Then her dark eyes turned anxiously to Jane. "Do you s'pose she'll—she'll send me away for breaking the dish?"

"Who—mother?" Jane could hardly understand how any one could imagine such a thing. "Of course she won't. She'll know it was an accident, and not your fault at all."

"I'll sweep up, and go and tell her right off."

Susan Trot

Miss Trot rose from the floor, almost her alert, cheerful self again. "I feel perfectly dreadful in my mind about that dish, but it ain't nothin' to what I'd experience if I had to go away from here. I never belonged to a family like this before, and I ain't got so yet that I know what you're all goin' to do or say next."

Jane laughed. "We don't know either," she said gaily. "But didn't you have jolly times with your own brothers and sisters, Susan?"

"Never had any." Miss Trot's face lost some of its brightness. "I can't even remember my own mother, and my father's dead, too."

"Why, Susan, then you're an orphan!" Jane's imagination rose to the occasion promptly, and she felt almost overwhelmed by the opportunity which seemed to be laid at her very feet. She sat down in the nearest chair, determined to investigate calmly and fully.

"Yes, I've pretty near always been one. I lived in one of them friendless homes from the time I was a baby till I went out to do housework 'bout two years ago."

Jane hesitated. Questions were struggling to be asked, but she kept them back. She was trying to be tactful, and not plunge into the midst of things the way her family always said she did. "Do you—can you—did you like it at the Home?"

Jane Stuart, Twin

she stammered at last, quite conscious that this wasn't at all what she wanted to ask.

"Well, it ain't one of the places you can be very crazy about," Susan responded drily, "'specially when you get older and have some thoughts of your own. Of course, you have to be glad that you've got a place to live in, but it ain't really excitin' to do things in flocks. I was always hopin' that some day there would be a happenin' that belonged to me all alone."

"Don't you know where you were born nor anything about your mother?" Jane persisted almost appealingly. With the eye of her mind she was already beginning to see Susan in a pretty dress with her hair fixed becomingly.

"It was somewheres out west, Miss Clara told me, and my mother died when I was just a few days old," answered Susan, wondering what made Jane start up from her chair and then sit down again firmly.

"Oh, Susan"—Jane was looking at the other girl with anxious excitement—"do you think it—it might have been the Pacific Coast?"

"I guess so. It might have been that for anythin' I know." This unusual interest in her affairs delighted Miss Trot, and she was eager to suit Jane's ideas so far as she could.

"You see all I know I got from Miss Clara,"

Susan Trot

she went on immediately. "And I've wished a million times that she'd asked my father all the questions I ——"

"Your father!" interrupted Jane blankly. And then, because she couldn't help it, she went on in a voice from which anticipation had fled, "I thought your father died before you were born."

Susan looked at her almost with suspicion. "I never said that," she answered with a little defiance in her manner. Girls had made fun of her before now. She wondered if Jane was like that.

"My father brought me to the Home when I was a year old," she said slowly. "He worked hard to pay for me as long as he could, and—and then by the time I was two years old he died."

"Oh," said Jane like one who comes out of a rosy dream. "Oh, I'm so sorry." All at once she realized the absurdity of jumping at conclusions so blindly. Never again should she make such a goose of herself. Never —

"I've always wanted to know," said Miss Trot dreamily, her black eyes mistily soft, "how it would seem in a home where there was a real mother, and now I do. I try to think how my mother would have seemed if I'd had her, and since yesterday," Susan's voice held a shy appeal that thrilled the listener's responsive heart, "since yesterday she's the very livin' image of your ma."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Well, I wish you had as nice a mother as mine this very minute," said Jane, feeling all at once that she wanted to hurry up-stairs, and talk to mother, and find out if she were quite well and happy, and whether there might be something that she, Jane, could do for her. "I'll come and see you again, but I must go now, Susan," she said, getting up from her chair hastily. "And don't you worry about mother's sending you away, because I just know she won't."

At sight of her mother, serenely advising Kenneth as to the disposal of his treasures, Jane's heart sang, and high resolve found place in her mind. "I'll finish unpacking before dinner, and surprise mother," she promised herself, and tiptoed away without disturbing the two busy people.

Once in her own room she stood very still for a moment and reflected. "Jane Stuart, you're a goosander," she said to herself sternly. This was a word she and David had once come upon in the dictionary, and, though its meaning wasn't appropriate to this occasion, Jane thought the sound of it was. "Yes, sir, a goosander. You might know that there isn't one chance in a million that you could find your cousin. Now as a punishment you're not going to be allowed to imagine wild things the next time you meet an orphan. You've got to learn to have some sense." With

Susan Trot

which effort at self-discipline, Jane flew at her open trunk, and nearly fell inside in her effort to regain her own self-respect.

Two hours later, David, on his way to dinner, paused at his twin's door in surprise, for her trunk was empty and ready to be carried away, and the whole room had an air of spick and span primness which did not always accompany Jane's efforts.

"Well, you have done it this time, haven't you?" he said with an air of wondering astonishment that delighted his sister beyond words.

"Of course. Why so astounded?" answered Jane, raising her eyebrows in mild reproof. "Go to, proud lad, and never think again thou art the only neat and trustworthy person in the family. Thee hast—I mean, thou hast a truly wonderful sister."

"Forsooth, fair maid, methinks I hast. But what—why ——"

"I'm a reformed character, Spinksy Stuart. You shall not have all the orderliness that ought to be divided between us. And isn't my room dear with all the old-fashioned furniture, and that lovely blue and white bedspread?"

"Great. Come on down to dinner. I'm tickled to death to have you finish so early, because we can go exploring this afternoon if mother will let us."

Jane Stuart, Twin

There was so much to be seen and done about the house, however, that the twins didn't get started early, and the explorations resolved themselves into a walk to the village stores to do some errands for mother.

"We've seen a great deal, mother," said Jane, on her return. "We've gazed on the High School and the Public Library, and a bright green house, and two tailless kittens playing together, and a dog carrying the mail in his mouth. But I was terribly disappointed, because I kept expecting some nice lady to rush up to me and say, 'Are you Elizabeth Archer's daughter?' And then when I proudly answered 'Yes,' she would fold me in her arms, and continue, 'My dear, I have a daughter just your age. She will go to see you to-morrow.' Somehow things never happen the way they do in books," Jane finished disconsolately.

Elizabeth Archer Stuart laughed at her daughter's mournful expression. "The town has changed a good deal since I lived here," she admitted. "I've been asking Mr. Chope about the old friends, and many of them have gone somewhere else to live. But there must be some nice girls."

"And all I can do is to wait for them to discover what an attractive young thing I am," murmured Jane with returning cheerfulness. "Now

Susan Trot

I want to find Spinksy again and go once more around the garden before supper. I just love this garden, mother, with all its cunning paths, and the grape-arbors, and the little summer-house."

David was not to be found, and the other children were absorbed in a game and resented interruption, so Jane paced the garden paths by herself, and thought about Sterling and wondered what her friends were doing. She had started around the garden in the opposite direction from the one she had taken in the morning, but when she reached the beds where seeds were planted her early experience came quickly to her mind. There, scratching industriously in the dark, rich earth, and placidly certain that the place belonged to her without restriction, was a speckled hen.

Jane's ire rose. Why didn't people take better care of their hens, she should like to know.

"You miserable, fat thing, I explained to you this morning that this wasn't your yard," she said wrathfully, moving toward the intruder.

The hen gave a sudden squawk which made Jane jump, and scuttling along with flapping, outspread wings, started across the garden in the opposite direction from home and friends.

"Here, don't go that way. Come back, you goose—I mean, hen." Running swiftly, Jane cut

Jane Stuart, Twin

off the retreat of the protesting fowl, and turned her in the direction of the dividing fence. A moment later the plump, fluffy creature was in her hands.

“Wretched thing! Why don’t you talk English if you’ve got anything to say?” she scolded, running rapidly along, her eyes fixed on the hen’s speckled back. “Just tell the person you belong to that I don’t think much of people who can’t keep their hens at home.”

She was almost at the fence as she said the last words, and the sound of a suppressed chuckle made her look up suddenly. Carried on involuntarily by the impetus of her pace nothing but the barrier between the lots kept her from running into a boy, who was standing there, looking, so it seemed to Jane, as though he had been there forever.

At the unexpected sight, she nearly dropped her burden, and in her anxiety squeezed the unhappy hen with such unnecessary fervor that it squawked and fluttered desperately.

“Ouch!” exclaimed Jane, hating the feeling of the struggling body and wanting to get rid of it as soon as possible. “Excuse me! I mean—I didn’t mean—oh, why don’t you take your hen, and chain her or do something?” She was almost forcing the wriggling creature into the boy’s arms

Susan Trot

as she spoke. Then a sudden doubt made her draw back a little. "I suppose that hen-house belongs to you, doesn't it?"

"It surely does," admitted the youth with an exceedingly pleasant smile. That was all Jane noticed about his looks except that his eyes were concealed by smoked glasses. As she said afterward she wasn't thinking about features at that moment.

"Well, this hen persists in coming over here to scratch up our seeds." Jane was trying to be calm and to speak with polite decision. "And if you would be so kind as to take her ——"

"I'll take her if you insist upon it." The boy's face was scarlet, and Jane knew he was doing his best to keep from laughing.

"I certainly do insist," she said with very proper dignity.

"All right then, but she doesn't belong to me. Mine are all fed and counted and shut up. This one belongs to Mr. Chope."

"But you must be mistaken," insisted Jane, blushing hotly. "This is the very same hen I chased this morning. She—she feels like the same one, and she's speckled ——"

The boy on the other side of the fence went off into a fit of helpless laughter, from which he emerged long enough to gasp, "Most of 'em do

Jane Stuart, Twin

feel alike. And there are speckled hens and speckled hens. You really can't ——"

"Oh," said Jane, seeing the funny side of it for the first time. She stared at him blankly for an instant, a dawning mirth in her eyes. Then with the offended hen filling the air with passionate clucking she flew down the path toward the barn.

Five minutes later, David, promenading up and down the front piazza with his mother, heard Jane's laugh just behind them.

"Mrs. Janes has had a great day, mother," he said, wheeling suddenly to confront his twin. "She knows who her nearest neighbors are, and something about Miss Trot, and —— What's the joke now, Janey?"

Jane's cheeks were like roses and her eyes sparkled with laughter. "Well, Spinksy," she began, with the irresistible giggle which always made her brother laugh even before he knew the joke, "now she can tell you the tragic tale of 'The Boy; the Girl; and the Speckled Hen.'"

CHAPTER V

THE ATTIC

"I'd give anything I own to be looking out on a stone sidewalk with lots of people going by." Jane's tone was mournful to a degree, and with reason, she felt, for rain had been falling steadily for three days, and the whole landscape was drenched and uninviting. "Just imagine knowing that you could take a few steps and find a girl waiting for you," she went on with a deep sigh. "I'm hungry for a girl this minute."

"You sound like an ogger; the 'fee-fi-fo-fum' kind," observed Kenneth, who was working hard over the construction of a small boat.

"Ken, I heard mother tell you yesterday that that word is 'o-gre.'" Judy made up a very round mouth for the first syllable, and her primness of manner was accentuated by the care with which she was polishing the knobs on the andirons.

"O-ger-acious, so it is," drawled Kenneth, hoping the family would appreciate his pun. "Anyway 'ogger' sounds more—more 'oggerish.' Oh, fudge, I'm going out and get Mr. Chope to help me on this boat. I can't do a thing with the sail."

Jane Stuart, Twin

Jane watched her young brother with listless interest as he splashed through all the deepest puddles he could find on his way to the barn. It was the afternoon of the first Saturday since their arrival, and at this moment she realized fully how much she had been counting on it. She hadn't expected to begin to know girls the very first day, she told herself, but she had supposed that Saturday would bring them, and now this forlorn drenching rain was enough to keep any one at home.

"Seems to me we're awfully far from any house where there are girls and boys of our age," she said soberly to David, who came into the room just then, and over to the window.

"Oh, I don't know. When I went to the post-office yesterday I struck up an acquaintance with Robert Randall. He's a nice chap, but he hasn't any sister."

"More's the pity. And I shall be embarrassed to death if I ever meet him again. I never shall get over trying to make him take that wretched speckled hen."

David shouted with laughter at the recollection. "He asked me if my sister was still collecting hens," he said with a chuckle.

"Not really! I suppose he thought that was funny, but I don't." In spite of her scornful

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tone Jane had to try very hard to keep from laughing.

“What’s the matter with that girl in the big house? She’s near enough for you.”

Jane pressed her face close to the rain-swept pane, and for the hundredth time stared at the red roof rising from among the trees.

“They haven’t come yet. At least they hadn’t last night, so Susan said.”

“Mr. Chope says they’re due ’bout now,” put in Judy, hitching across the rug to attack the other andiron. “They’re awful rich and have loads of company, so probably the girl won’t have any time for you, Jane.”

“Probably not,” sighed Jane. It was easy to believe the worst, because deep in her mind she had expected girls would flock around her at once just as they had in Sterling. They might have found time even if they were in school, she thought with a little frown. It was foolish to wait until Saturday and then not be able to come. She hoped she should always remember how forlorn strange girls feel —

“You certainly have a very talking face, Janesy,” David said suddenly. “I bet you’re thinking the girls might come even if it does rain, and you’re sure that it’s a thousand years since you left Sterling, and that we’re ten thousand miles from there,

Jane Stuart, Twin

and that if you ever get a chance to call on a new girl you'll be waiting on the door-step when she arrives, and ——"

Jane had to laugh in spite of herself. "Goosey! You did get some of it right, though. I might just as well give them up for this afternoon, I suppose, for they'd have to come in boats or swim."

"And the best families don't make calls in their bathing-suits," added her brother absurdly. "Say, Judy, you've made those andirons look great." He dropped down on the floor beside Judy as he spoke, and they both went off into shouts of laughter over the grotesque reflection of their faces in the shining brass balls.

Kenneth, coming in from the barn to get something he needed for his boat, fell into the snare, and made faces at himself with such overwhelming success that Jane couldn't keep away, and was quite cheered by the attempt to make her reflection more funnily hideous than the others.

"Golly! I forgot Mr. Chope is waiting for this," Kenneth exclaimed, jumping up suddenly. "I hope he won't go off and do anything else. He's the greatest man I ever saw. There isn't anything he doesn't know."

"I wish he knew something for me to do when I've got all my housework done and don't want to read, or to write letters," yawned Jane.

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"I'll ask him," and Kenneth rushed off again, thinking his sister in earnest, and quite confident that his admired friend would find a way out of this difficulty.

"Want to play any game that I know how to play?" suggested David, hoping in his secret soul that his offer would be refused, for a book was calling him.

"No, thanks. And I don't want to play that awful question and answer game, Judy." Jane nipped her sister's usual proposition in the bud before she had time to voice it. "I'm going up-stairs, and read over my train letters again. That's sure to make me feel nice and cheerful," she ended with grim sarcasm.

David walked to the foot of the stairs with her. "Brace up, Lady Jane," he said with an encouraging pat, "you've been a good sport all the week. Mother said so. At least she didn't say it quite that way, but she meant it. And the Randall boy seemed quite interested in the family. So you see people are beginning to take notice."

"Humph! I should think he might. I don't believe I'm going to like that boy. But did mother really say that? I believe after all I'll go and talk to her. She always cheers me up," and Jane ran up-stairs with her mind made up to something more enlivening than the reading of farewell letters.

Jane Stuart, Twin

Out in the barn Kenneth was looking on absorbedly while Mr. Chope, with fingers that looked too stiff and knotted for so delicate a task, rigged the little boat.

"There, sir," he said at last, setting it up before them and squinting at it reflectively, "there's a ship that can stand the roughest seas you can find betwixt here and the house. I bet she's a steady-goer, too. It takes an old salt like me to make a boat that'll 'sail the ocean blue.' "

"She's a beauty. What do you think would be a good name for her? I saw a boat once called the 'Clipper.' Do you like that?"

"Well, that ain't so bad," answered Mr. Chope, thoughtfully chewing the end of a straw. "'Clipper' or 'Sea-Rover'—that's pretty neat, ain't it? Or there's the 'Saucy Susan.' That makes you think of a blue sky and a spankin' breeze and a 'heave ho, my hearties.' But, after all, there's plenty of those names scuddin' over the ocean. Why don't you name it somethin' that has a story tied on to it?" Mr. Chope's eyes assumed a far-away, almost mystical expression, and Kenneth leaned forward eagerly to catch the next words.

"Somethin' like—like ——" the little man went on dreamily. "Name it the 'Argo,' and pretend you're goin' after that there 'golden fleece,' " he ended explosively.

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Kenneth's eyes widened with surprise. "Do you know that story 'bout Jason?" he questioned joyfully, "all 'bout how he tamed the bulls, and sowed the dragon's teeth?"

"And the 'Argo' was the biggest ship any one had seen, and Her-cules went with Jason, and Or—Or—I never kin remember the name of that feller that played to the wild beasts——"

"I guess you mean Or-phe-us," suggested Kenneth diffidently. He wasn't sure whether it ought to be in three syllables or not, and he looked anxiously toward the house, half expecting that Judy might correct him even at this distance. "Come on, let's play it now. I'll be Jason, and you can be Her-Her-cules." Kenneth felt certain there was something wrong about this last name, but who was he that he should challenge Mr. Chope's pronunciation.

"No, I'll be Or-phe-us. I kin play a little on the mouth-organ, and I allus did like the idea of charmin' the beasts. I perform for Sally's benefit sometimes."

Kenneth looked at fat old Sally, dozing contentedly in her stall, and then at Mr. Chope who was gazing at him diffidently. "I bet Sally likes it awfully when you play to her," he said with polite warmth. "Now let's take the 'Argo' out and sail her. Why don't you

Jane Stuart, Twin

bring your mouth-organ? We may meet some wild beasts."

There was an expectant twinkle in Mr. Chope's eyes as he started toward the stairs which led to his room, but half-way there he was stopped by Kenneth's voice.

"I forgot I told Jane I'd ask you something," the boy said disappointedly. "Can you think of anything a girl can do when she's got all her housework done, and doesn't want to read, or to write letters? Please think quick, 'cause I want to sail the boat."

Mr. Chope came slowly back, running his fingers through his hair until it stood up excitedly. It was evident that he was thinking deeply, and there was a hint of mystery in the gaze he bent upon Kenneth. Finally he brought his fist down into his other hand with a suddenness that made the boy jump. "What would Jason, what would any of them fellers have done if they'd wanted to know anythin'?" he demanded.

Kenneth was thrilled to the point of dumbness by this sudden challenge. He tried to think what his favorite heroes would have done under the circumstances, but could only stare blankly, and wait for further explanation.

"Don't you remember about them orryculls?" Mr. Chope went on in a portentous manner, and

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quite as if he were sure that it could be nothing more than a lapse of memory in the case of his young friend. "Wouldn't they have gone and asked their 'talkin' oaks' or their 'sacred bulls' what to do?"

"Why—yes—I s'pose. But—but trees don't really talk, you know," stammered Kenneth, a little dazed by this attempt to adapt mythology to modern life.

"Well, p'raps not—round here," conceded Mr. Chope handsomely. "Probably the one that settled this place didn't think nothin' about settin' out that variety. They'd have been mighty handy, though. But what do you say to Sally, now? I think, myself, she'd make a pretty fine orrycull."

There was a glimmer in the eye, a reassuring something in Mr. Chope's friendly smile which made Kenneth understand, and filled him with delight. Here was some one who would go the length in making believe, he assured himself joyously.

"All right, let's try Sally," he said, with an air of such solemn confidence that for a moment even Mr. Chope was deceived. "You'll have to tell me how, though, because, of course, there were different ways with different oracles, weren't there?"

"Sure," assented Mr. Chope, eyeing him a little sharply. "This time I'll run it. S'pose you jest

Jane Stuart, Twin

step into the other room and see how many buckles you can count on the harness I've got hung up there, and when I call ——”

Kenneth didn't really see what counting buckles had to do with it, but being a faithful man under orders he went to work without question. He could hear Mr. Chope stepping around softly, and there was a sound as of something being tacked. Then silence—a long one—and after that more walking about.

“What number you got to, odd or even?” called Mr. Chope cheerfully.

“Odd.”

“Then come out. I spoke jest in the nick o' time, didn't I?”

Kenneth appeared from the other room looking pleased and expectant. His eye traveled at once to Sally's stall, over the front of which black mosquito-netting had been hung. Attached to the netting in apparent haste were mystic figures cut from white paper. Kenneth had only time to notice that they were mostly hearts and diamonds before Mr. Chope spoke again.

“You see Sally and I—we wasn't, so to speak, prepared, but we made it the best we could,” he said with modest pride. “Now, Mr. Jason, you take this stool right here in front of the stall, and ask your question real loud and clear. These

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orryculls is apt to git absent-minded once in a while."

Kenneth sat down upon the stool which Mr. Chope placed with solicitous care, and cleared his throat in sudden embarrassment. For a fleeting instant he was self-conscious and ill at ease. Then the habits of his life reasserted themselves. He was Jason for the moment, with the golden fleece yet unsought, and here, hidden from him by this mysterious drapery, was the oracle.

"Kind oracle," he began with a catch in his voice, "can you think of anything for a girl to do on a rainy afternoon when she's got her house-work done, and doesn't want to read or write letters?"

"Well done," said Mr. Chope softly; "'tain't every one could forgit himself like that when he had his first chance at an orrycull. Now keep your eye on the stall, and hark."

Kenneth listened with such intensity that the silence around him almost hurt. Suddenly a low murmuring sound came from behind the curtain, and then, in a queer, throaty voice the words, "Look in my stall."

"Sounds as if she had a sore throat, doesn't it?" said Kenneth, trying to speak lightly, but getting off the stool in haste, and around where he could see Mr. Chope's face.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Very likely. Or p'raps she's bashful. She ain't much used to orryculling. Now we'll take down the curtain and look in the stall."

It was a relief to Kenneth to see the fat old horse placidly munching oats. He walked along cautiously in the wake of Mr. Chope. In his inmost heart he knew that it was all a game, but he was not taking any chances.

"I'll jest step inside the stall and look around. Sally ain't much used to visitors," chuckled Mr. Chope, walking in the most unconscious manner directly past a piece of white paper which Kenneth saw at once. It was stuck in a crack so near the entrance of the stall that he could reach it without going inside, and his shout of glee made Mr. Chope turn at once.

"Found somethin'?" he inquired eagerly; and then, as Sally poked her sleek nose into his hand, "You put it up where it wouldn't git trod on, didn't you, old lady?"

Kenneth took the paper to the nearest window, and studied it intently.

"Somethin' writ on it?" ventured Mr. Chope casually. "I wouldn't have thought Sally could use her hoofs that way. But you never kin tell."

"It's printed. It's awfully good printing, too. Something like a book, only ——"

"Only?" questioned Mr. Chope, the expression

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of pride which had come with the first words fading a little when the boy paused.

"Only—nothing," responded Kenneth, quick to read the wrinkled face looking so anxiously at him. "It's great. I wouldn't have believed a horse could do it, either. I ——" and then they both went off into an uncontrollable burst of laughter which cemented their friendship still more strongly.

Kenneth got his breath first and was at the paper again.

"Try the ATIC * * * THEIRS TRUNKS," he read distinctly.

"Now what do you s'pose the orrycull means by that?" demanded Mr. Chope excitedly. "And all them little stars! My gracious, I didn't know what a genius I had in this barn."

"Probably there are trunks in the attic, and things in 'em that children can play with on a rainy day."

"To be sure. Why didn't I think of that? S'pose you run in, sonny, and tell your ma all about it. Of course there might be trunks—and likely as not things in 'em."

Kenneth started on the run across the barn, but at the door he stopped and turned back. "You're sure you don't mind," he hesitated, "if we don't play 'bout Jason and Orpheus this afternoon? You see the Stuart family loves dressing-up, and if

Jane Stuart, Twin

there should be anything of that kind in the trunks p'raps I'd want ——”

“ You go 'long,” interrupted Mr. Chope with great cheerfulness. “ I don't mind a bit. Leave your boat here, though, and if Sally keeps on bein' real good-tempered I'll git her to letter the name on it for you.”

Kenneth's last backward glance took in Mr. Chope gazing after him with apparent seriousness, but he fancied as he dashed up the back steps that the sound of a laugh came from the direction of the barn.

“ Trunks in the attic, Susan ! ” he shouted as he dashed through the kitchen where Miss Trot, taking an afternoon rest in the rocking-chair, was patiently trying to tie a bow like the one Jane had worn that morning.

“ Whoop-ee ! Whoop-ee !
Moth-er ! Jan-ee !
Jud-ee ! Dav-ee ! ”

Kenneth's voice penetrated from room to room, up-stairs and down. It brought Mrs. Stuart and Jane to the head of the stairs, pulled David from his book and Judy from her family of dolls.

“ Kenneth, Kenneth, if you want me you must come where I am, and not make a noise like that,” said his mother decidedly.

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“Why, mother, I didn’t mean that for a noise—that was poetry. Didn’t you hear all those nice ‘ee’s’?” answered Kenneth, bounding up-stairs two steps at a time and feeling really disturbed when he found he had startled his mother. “Did I make you go all pale like that, little mudder? I’m awful sorry. I’ll just whisper the next time.

“Say, but let me tell you,” he went on quickly, “’bout the oracle out in Mr. Chope’s barn.”

“Oh, mother, do you think it would be all right for us to look in those trunks?” asked Jane as her brother finished his story. “There probably are loads of things for dressing-up.”

“I’m sure it will be,” answered her mother, who had held several conferences with Mr. Chope, but was in honor bound not to divulge any of the secrets he had told her.

“Then let’s, and, Spinksy, you’ve just got to come, because you’re the funniest one of all when you’re dressed up,” said Jane, taking command at once, and starting toward the stairs which led to the large attic.

This had been a realm of enchantment for all the children from the day of their arrival. In the first place there was the fragrance of dried herbs which every properly kept New England garret should have. Then there was a big, clear floor-space where one could play in rainy weather, and

Jane Stuart, Twin

around its edges trunks, and back of the trunks, cunningly tucked away under the eaves, boxes and bundles. Jane had said the moment she saw it, "Oh, what a place to rummage! If it only belonged to us!"

Now, with the shut-in days, the chance had come quite unexpectedly, and there had been no hesitation in mother's manner when she had agreed with Mr. Chope's oracle.

"My mother tells me to take this one," counted Jane standing before a row of trunks, and dabbing at each one with pointing finger. "Now how are we going to open it?"

"Here's a key tied to this handle," said David, taking off a key attached to a card. "'Key belonging to trunk marked J. M. A.,'" he read. In one corner of the card was the word "over" and he turned it to find something else written in the fine, delicate hand which they had learned to associate with Aunt Caroline. "Here's some poetry," he said, handing the card to Jane, who read it aloud.

"Here's a place where you may find
Costumes quite to suit your mind.
Caps and dresses, hoods and gloves,
Bonnets that are perfect loves.
They only wait a rainy day
To help you out in any play."

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"Now isn't that perfectly lovely of Aunt Caroline!" exclaimed Jane. "Mother has just been telling me about the grand surprises she used to make for her when she was a little girl. She must have written to tell Mr. Chope just what we could do."

"I should say that she must have been here quite lately," said David, who was examining the card again. "Look at the difference between the ink on this side, and the ink the poetry's written with. I don't believe that 'over' is more than two weeks old."

"Perhaps she has been here." Jane was quite struck with this idea. "It would explain several things if she had."

"Don't stop to talk about that. Let's open her up," begged Kenneth, who loved little mysteries too well to try to solve them.

That the rhyme had not exaggerated the treasures within was proved almost at first glance. There were woolen dresses and silk ones; short-waisted gowns, and some with funny long points. There were queer-looking hats that had belonged to some long dead grandfather, and a bandbox full of flower-trimmed bonnets under which rosy faces had looked out years ago.

"How did Aunt Caroline manage to get all these things?" asked Jane turning to her mother, who

Jane Stuart, Twin

had come up to see what treasures they had found.

"They were given to her mostly by her aunts. There were three unmarried aunts who lived in the other end of the town, great belles in their day. And they all left their precious belongings to Aunt Caroline. See those kid slippers, and those two plaid cloaks just alike."

"Here's 'costume trunk No. 2,'" said David, putting a key in the lock of a second trunk and lifting the lid. Mrs. Stuart watched them while they discovered fans and ruffles and, in a box, a massive white wig. "Now, children, everything must be taken care of as though it were the most precious thing on earth," she said as she started down-stairs. "This is a very rare privilege you're having, and I shall hold you responsible."

"All right, mother, we'll be good," and Jane, smiling from under a lace-trimmed cap, ran to the head of the stairs to wave her hand reassuringly.

"I'm going to be Benjamin Franklin, mother," called Kenneth, who had found a broad-brimmed hat, and a brown coat that came down to his heels. "Couldn't you send Susan up with a loaf of bread for me to put under my arm?"

"Pooh, what's the use of a real loaf when you can make believe anything?" David said scornfully. He had slipped on a silk gown which didn't begin

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to meet around his waist, and was trying the effect of a huge white straw bonnet trimmed with roses and blue ribbons. Jane always said that costumes bewitched David. He forgot to be sober and shy and quiet, and was the jolliest one of them all. Sometimes the two younger children could hardly separate him in their minds from the character he was pretending to be.

"Oh, fair lady, give me a little money, just a few pennies to buy bread for my nine starving children," begged Jane, who having discarded the dainty cap for a dark cloak and hood, was bending before the radiant court lady with outstretched hand.

"Do make it pie," observed Benjamin Franklin. "They'll like it much better." Although absorbed in his own entry into Philadelphia, the great man had still an ear and a thought for the needs of others.

"Say, Mrs. Janes, let's dress as nearly alike as we can, and see if the kids can tell us apart the first minute."

"All right. Come over behind that wardrobe. We'll have to find some way to cover our hair, though luckily yours is wavy, too."

Judy was so occupied in undressing an old-fashioned doll that she forgot to be curious when silence fell in the other end of the attic, broken only by whispers and stifled giggles!

Jane Stuart, Twin

Fifteen minutes later Jane's voice called, "You will now see Lady Rosabel Davida Montgomery and Lady Valeria Jane Montgomery. I'll give the first nickel I find on the roof to the one who guesses which is which right away. And you aren't allowed to come any nearer to us than half-way across the attic."

There was a sudden rush from behind the big wardrobe. So sudden that no one could have any idea of the gait of either high-born lady. Both wore short-waisted silk gowns, fringed mantles over their shoulders, and big straw bonnets which completely covered their heads in the back, and were protected in front by flowing lace veils.

"Aw, that isn't fair," expostulated Benjamin Franklin for whom Jane's nickel on the roof scheme held an abiding charm. "'Course we can't see anything through those thick veils."

With a concerted motion the twin ladies threw back their veils. They had been prepared for this protest. But even then for the first moment the younger children were puzzled. Before either one could speak the decisive word some one ran briskly up the stairs, and Susan Trot appeared.

"Your ma says would you please tell her where you put the thimble you was using," she said, her face beaming with delighted surprise as her eye fell upon the two wonderful figures. "Now ain't



“ YOU STAY AND PLAY WITH US ”

The Attic

that jest perfect? You couldn't hardly tell one from t'other, could you?"

"But which is which?" demanded Kenneth, stepping unexpectedly into his coat-tails, and sitting down suddenly. Things had come to a pretty pass if this girl who hadn't known his brother and sister long could tell them apart when he couldn't.

"Why, that one's Miss Jane," said Susan, indicating the right-hand lady with assurance. "I guess I could tell her hands wherever I'd see them."

"My fault, Davie," confessed Jane, sweeping the assembled company a low curtsy. "We meant to keep our hands hidden, but I forgot. I think I left the thimble on mother's table, Susan."

Miss Trot turned to go, then stopped. "I don't s'pose I could help you any 'bout puttin' those things away, could I?" she asked with a wistful hesitation in her manner that found its way to Jane's understanding at once.

"Why, yes, of course, only we don't want to put them away just yet. But you stay and play with us. We'll have Captain John Smith and the Indians. There are some jolly Indian things in one of those trunks, and you'll make a perfectly grand Pocahontas."

Susan's eyes flashed a joyous response, but she could hardly believe in such good fortune. "I

Jane Stuart, Twin

s'pose I'd better go down and ask your mother," she said, hoping and doubting at the same moment.

"Yes, but don't be long." Jane saw artistic possibilities in Miss Trot's black hair and dark skin, and she was eager to begin the costuming. "Oh, Spinksy, you go, will you?" she went on hastily. "You're a perfect peach in that dress, and I do want mother to see you. And please find the thimble for her, and ask her if Susan may stay up here for a while. Mother'll have to answer the bell if she does, but there isn't a chance that any one will come in this rain."

David was half-way down-stairs by this time, but stopped to ask meekly, "Anything more, your Highness?"

"Yes. Come back as soon as you can, because you'll have to be Captain Smith. And—Davee—bring up some cookies."

"All right," came promptly back. Then David shut the door at the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER VI

JUST CAROL

DAVID said afterward that all his misery of the next half hour could have been avoided if Jane hadn't been greedy and asked for cookies. He went straight to his mother's room, displayed his costume and was duly admired. Then he found the thimble under a chair, and, having got his mother's ready consent in regard to Miss Trot, started for the attic again. Half-way there he remembered Jane's request and turned back.

At the head of the stairs which led into the front hall the spirit of the past seized him, as it had several times since they had come to live in this old house. David loved history and this very day had been reveling in a book of colonial tales which had set him dreaming of the brave men and lovely ladies who lived in those times. His costume, too, inspired him, and quite unconsciously he went down the stairs, taking ladylike steps, and fluttering the fan which hung by a ribbon at his side. Just so, he fancied, might the fair lady whose gown he was wearing have glided down to meet her guests.

Jane Stuart, Twin

As he reached the hall something brought him suddenly back to earth again, and he became conscious that a girl, a girl whom he had never seen before, was looking in at the long window beside the front door. Worse than that, she was smiling and nodding, and tapping gently on the glass as though she expected him to let her in.

His first impulse was to rush for the shelter of the dining-room and go from there through the kitchen and up the back stairs. But unfortunately the girl had seen him, and she could never make his mother hear unless she had sense enough to ring the bell, and she ought not to be left in the pouring rain.

There was no way out of it, though his mind ran through the possible avenues of escape with more than its usual quickness. For a brief instant he wondered if he could make her think he was a ghost if he just stared and vanished, but there was something about the girl's clever, laughing face that banished the idea immediately. Then he opened the door.

"Oh, I beg your pardon for staring so, but I was just going to ring the bell when I caught a glimpse of you, and you were so perfectly splendid I couldn't take my eyes off of you. You're Jane Stuart, aren't you, and you're dressing up, or having tableaux or something perfectly fascinating?"

Just Carol

I just perfectly adore doing things of that kind. Oh, excuse me, I'm Carol Heath, and I'm your nearest neighbor, and I just got home an hour ago. I couldn't wait another minute, though mother said it was perfectly heathenish for me to make my first call on such a rainy day."

David had his opinion of a girl who didn't take the advice of her mother. He drew in a deep breath, and prepared to explain that he was Jane's brother and would gladly find his sister, but before he could utter a word Miss Carol Heath was off again.

"How do you like Belhaven, and have you met many girls yet? I was perfectly crazy with joy when I found out you had come to live here, and I couldn't wait a minute, though mother did say it was perfectly heathen—oh, I said that before, didn't I?" and Carol went off into a burst of rippling laughter which made David smile in spite of himself.

In his own mind he was still trying to find a way out of the situation. "If I say I'm a boy she'll think I'm a freak for dressing up in these clothes," he meditated. "I bet my only hope is to let her keep on thinking I'm a girl until I can get the chance to slip out, and make Jane slip in." Which, after all, would not have been a bad idea had the eyes of his guest been less keen, and her sense of fun not so pronounced.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Come into the library, please, Miss Heath," he said, doing his best to make his voice sound like his sister's, and wondering what on earth Jane would be likely to say next.

"Ple-ase don't call me Miss Heath. I'm just Carol," implored that young person. A gleam of mischief came into her eyes as David strode across the hall in distinctly boyish fashion, and threw open the library door.

"Oh, all right," answered David, with what he hoped was a Jane-like smile. He knew that he couldn't call her Carol at that moment if his life depended on it. "That's a pretty name," he went on. "I—I really like it. I—we ——" and then he relapsed into silence, asking himself how girls could gush over each other when they first met, and what they could find to talk about.

"I'm glad you like it," said Carol with her bubbling laugh. David thought she laughed too easily. "It's really Caroline, you know, but that's so old-fashioned. But then old-fashioned names are stylish now. Jane is a perfectly darling name."

"We have a great-aunt Caroline," remarked David, feeling suddenly grateful to his mother's aunt for having that particular name.

"You have a brother named David, haven't you?" Carol's eyes were dancing, and her cheeks very red. Her dark hair, damp from the rain,

Just Carol

curled about her face. "I should think brothers must be perfectly—well, they must be an awful responsibility sometimes. You really never know what they are going to do next."

"That's so," assented David, hardly realizing what he was saying, and wondering wildly if he couldn't excuse himself on some pretext now and rush off to get his sister. Jane must swear never to give him away. So far everything seemed to be going well, but he didn't know how long he could keep it up. Suddenly he became aware that his guest was gazing at him expectantly, and waiting for him to break the silence. "She wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise at first," he thought with some irritation, "and now she expects me to talk all the time."

"I'll go and get my sister, Julia," he said, rising suddenly, and almost falling over his gown as he took the first step. "Judy is just wild to know you, and she'll never forgive me if I don't tell her you're here. She will ——" and then every word he had said or ever intended to say was blotted out of his mind by the awful knowledge that his sisters and brother were coming down the front stairs. Now they were giggling and whispering in the hall, now —

There was a succession of wild war-whoops as four individuals dressed in the most striking

Jane Stuart, Twin

Indian costumes that Jane's clever mind and fingers could devise swept into the room, all with their eyes fixed on the unfortunate colonial lady. For an instant the girl sitting a little in the shadow escaped notice.

"Davy, you're a quitter," and "Spinksy, you meanly went back to your book," came simultaneously from Kenneth and Jane.

Then the latter, noticing the guest, gave a little squeak of surprise. Here at last was a girl! Jane forgot that feathers were sticking up in her hair, that a gaudy Indian blanket draped her from head to foot, that her face was smudged with black and touched up with patches of vivid red. A moment ago she had been Powhatan, the stately father of Pocahontas. Now she was just Jane Stuart, heart-hungry for a girl of her own age, ready to like at once the stranger whose dark eyes were looking straight into hers.

"David Stuart, why didn't you tell me that some one had come?" she said, mingling her sweetest smile and her glaring make-up with an effect that made the irrepressible Kenneth cast himself on the floor and howl with laughter.

"Oh, Janey, do it again, do it again," he begged, bouncing up and looking imploringly at his sister. "Oh, you never saw anything so funny as you look when you smile. I bet old Powhatan never

Just Carol

laughed. If he did they couldn't have had him for chief; he'd have broken up all the pow-wows."

"Kenneth!" thundered the colonial beauty in his fiercest, deepest voice. Jane's sudden clutch at her hair, her distressful start toward the door had broken the spell which bound her twin. "Jane, this is Carol Heath, and she likes dressing-up. I was just going to call you and Judy when I heard you on the stairs."

"We—we thought we'd surprise you," faltered Powhatan, looking almost mournful because she didn't dare to smile. Then all at once she was Jane again, and holding out both hands to her guest with a magnificent disregard of her own appearance. "My hands are clean, if my face isn't," she said with an irresistible giggle, "and you can't imagine how glad I am to see you. And if you like dressing-up, don't you want to come up in the attic and do it, too? We're just going to have some cookies if David ever gets them."

"I'd love it, and probably I kept your brother from getting the cookies," responded the other girl, giving David a shy, mischievous glance as she spoke. "He was trying to make me think he was Jane, and, of course, I had to help him out."

David looked at her reproachfully. "You were trying to make me believe I was Jane," he corrected. Then, as Carol's merry laugh rang out,

Jane Stuart, Twin

he added with suspicion in his tone, "Do you mean to say you were only kidding me all the time?"

"Just for the first minute I really thought you were a girl," confessed Carol, "and then you were so scared and funny I talked fast so that you wouldn't have a chance to explain. I'm crazy to know how you expected to get out of it."

"That's a dead secret," David answered impressively. "Ken, why can't you and Susan get the cookies now you're down-stairs? Oh, I forgot, mother said Susan could stay with us as well as not. Now I'm going to get out of this toggery."

"I didn't know you had a sister Susan," said Carol Heath, opening her eyes very wide. "Our up-stairs maid said there were Jane and David and Judy and Kenneth."

"That's right," said Jane, thinking very fast. She just loved the way Carol said "up-stairs maid." It sounded so simple, so used-to-it. Perhaps this longed-for companion wouldn't care to associate with a girl who worked in somebody's kitchen. She wondered if Miss Trot would mind if they played with her some other day. Then a sudden picture of the girl's eager happiness over the costuming swept through her memory. "Coward," she flung at herself fiercely, and glanced involuntarily at her twin as if for support at this trying moment. His expression was saying as

Just Carol

plainly as possible "Stuart obliges," and Jane felt that she could almost hear the words.

"Susan isn't our sister, but she's one of our newest friends," she began, wishing that her face were clean so that she could feel natural and not look so solemn over it. "She lives here, and we all help each other about the housework. Doesn't she make a perfectly dandy Pocahontas, with all that black hair?"

Miss Trot felt a little bashful at having the light of publicity so suddenly thrown upon her, and wriggled uncomfortably, and wished she had slipped out when she first saw the guest. Oh, no, not that, for then she would have missed hearing that she was one of their friends, which was the most splendid thing that ever had happened to her. She gazed at Jane adoringly, her bright eyes soft with feeling.

"She looks just like some picture I've seen," said Carol Heath, responding to Jane's challenge with such enthusiasm that David secretly dubbed her a trump. "And I want to be made into something or somebody, and I'm just famishing for a cookie. Can't we go up-stairs now?"

It was quite evident that it had seemed a crisis to all of them, and from that moment the allegiance of the tribe of Stuart was hers. Kenneth flew to get cookies; Judy hovered about her admiringly.

Jane Stuart, Twin

Jane led her new friend up-stairs, and took her in to be introduced to mother.

"Such richness!" sighed Carol, when they all met again in the attic. "I mean the costumes, not the cookies, though they are the most delicious things I ever put into my mouth."

"Have another." David, restored to his masculine preëminence as head of the family, passed the plate of cookies around the group a second time. He felt much more at his ease, now, and quite at peace with this girl who fell in so readily with their pet diversions.

"Now let's do Pocahontas, because we're most of us ready for it, and then Carol can choose something," proposed Jane. "Spinksy, you'll have to put on something to make you look like Captain Smith. There's a canvas coat hanging in the corner, and a canvas hat. They'll do."

"I'll be another squaw." Carol took out a hair-pin or two, pulled off a ribbon bow, and shook her soft black hair around her face. "Now that green skirt and the red shawl. Come on, Judy, you and I will stand together and shriek when Pocahontas does her act. Indian women never do shriek, I believe, but we ought to have a little more tragedy in it somewhere."

"I must have on our great-uncle's hunting-coat," said David, whose hands had instinctively sought

Just Carol

the pockets. "See, here's his card, 'Stephen H. Eliot.' "

"Funny thing to carry calling-cards in your hunting-coat, I should say," observed Judy in a disparaging tone. "He isn't really our great-uncle, you know," she explained to Carol Heath. "Just our great-aunt's husband, and not a smidgit of relation to us."

"I suppose the card was there so that people would know who he was if anything happened to him," Carol said quickly. "I'm sure I think it is a very good plan."

"Well, if you think so, I do," assented Judy, with surprising amiability.

"Now, come on," Jane said impatiently. "First we have Captain Smith and his trusty companion stealing through the forest, you know."

The little play, which Jane and David had written several years before, went off with even more spirit than usual. Pocahontas did her part surprisingly well, considering her stage-fright and lack of preparation, and went through it in a state of suppressed excitement which made her eyes shine like stars. Never in all her sixteen years had she seen or done anything so wonderful as this. The only thing that troubled her was to see Jane's fairness obscured and disfigured.

"Bully for you, Susan!" said Kenneth, when

Jane Stuart, Twin

the final scene had been ended, and the touching fidelity of the Indian maiden was once more only a thing of story. "You were great in that last act."

"It's only what I'd do in a minute for any of you," averred Miss Trot, finding voice and words surprisingly, and gazing around the little circle with shining eyes. "Now I must go down and look at my fire, and begin on gettin' supper. I'll bring these clothes right back, and—and I've had an awful good time."

"Glad of it, Susan," said Jane, pleasantly conscious that it was she who had suggested it, though she wouldn't for anything have acknowledged the feeling. "I'm going to run down-stairs and wash my face before we do anything else. I'm tired of looking such a guy."

"I should think you would be," said Judy with sisterly promptness. "You're a sight."

"Well, you're not so beautiful yourself. Come on, let's both go. Carol can have some stunt all ready to surprise us when we come back."

Jane, who was always mistress of the revels in her own family, hardly expected to be taken at her word, but when she returned, rosy-cheeked, and quite able to smile, a brilliant figure stepped from behind the big wardrobe to greet her. It was an Italian girl, strumming on an almost stringless

Just Carol

guitar and singing a gay little song with strange words that none of them could understand. Her black hair was caught up on top of her head, and a crimson rose bloomed in its dusky depths. She was dressed in a gown of soft green, and over her shoulders hung a silk scarf embroidered in bright colors.

Jane gave a little gasp as the small sweet voice ceased, and the Signorina flashed out of sight again. "Talk about being artistic," she said with honest fervor. "I do wish that Mabel Haynes could see that. She'd never talk about me any more. And imagine singing in Italian! I suppose you speak it, too?"

"Yes," answered Carol, coming, when she had taken off her costume, to join the family again. "I ought to. We've lived in Italy two winters. Ouch! There goes that ankle again!" She sank on the floor holding her foot with both hands. "I sprained it last winter, and it won't get strong," she explained when the pain had subsided a little. "Every once in a while it just flops over like that."

Jane gazed at her with admiration undisguised. To have lived two winters in Italy and refer to it in that every-day manner! Jane longed to travel.

"I shall have to go," declared Carol, getting up and testing her ankle tenderly. "I'd stop and

Jane Stuart, Twin

help you put these things away, but I'm afraid my mother won't like it." For some reason her face lost the animation which was one of its chief charms. "Don't bother to come down. I can find my way. And you must all come to see me as soon as you can. I can't promise you anything like such a good time as I've had, though. It isn't half such fun being the only one in your family."

"Jane and I are going to your driveway with you," said David, as they all trooped down-stairs. "And if I hold the umbrella so that water drips on you don't you dare to say anything. It will be only a proper punishment for the way you fooled me this afternoon."

"We'll have to hurry now to get those costumes put away," said Jane, when they had left Carol and turned toward home again. "Wasn't it funny the way she got quieter and quieter the nearer we came to her house? It really seemed to me she looked a little bit unhappy."

"I didn't notice it." David's matter-of-fact manner frequently put a damper on his twin's flights of imagination. "It seems to me girls are always fancying things about each other."

Miss Trot had help as usual with the supper-dishes that night, and after Jane, whose turn it was, had wiped and put away the last dish and

Just Carol

said good-night, she cleaned the sink and rinsed the towels with even more than her ordinary neatness.

Mr. Chope, coming in with kindlings for the morning fire, found her scrubbing the top of the table with an ardor that spared no stain.

"Gettin' kinder thin, ain't it?" he asked mildly, regarding the table with a critical eye. "Better leave enough of the top to set things on, hadn't you?"

Miss Trot didn't even glance at him, but she couldn't help hearing the soft chuckle which followed his remark.

"You had a pretty good time up in the attic, I hear," Mr. Chope went on, his tranquillity not in the least disturbed by Miss Trot's scorn. "The boys said you done somethin' great."

"Did they really say that?" The girl turned upon him suddenly, her face full of questioning delight. "I'll tell you all about it. Sit down, there."

"I dunno's I mind," conceded the old man, taking the chair indicated by the imperious finger.

It was a thrilling recital for both of them, told in minute detail from the moment Miss Trot joined the attic party. Mr. Chope showed a flattering interest, and made her repeat certain incidents, to her manifest gratification.

Jane Stuart, Twin

“Sho, you don’t say so,” he said slowly, when he had heard for the second time how they had surprised David, and how the visitor had thought Miss Trot was one of the family. “She spoke right up for you, did she, and said you was one of their friends? And told ’bout how you all helped with the housework? Now I call that mighty square of Lady Jane. You see I wouldn’t have felt quite sure jest what she would say—under the circumstances—so to speak.” Mr. Chope felt that perhaps he should not have shown his surprise, and hoped he had extricated himself from a difficult situation with delicacy.

“She talked it right off when she once got started jest as if I was—as if I was the proudest friend she had,” ended Susan triumphantly.

“I ain’t a bit sure that you ain’t.” Mr. Chope relapsed into silence after this last rather puzzling remark. Suddenly he slapped his knee with such energy that Miss Trot caught her tongue between her teeth so that it hurt.

“Whatever is the matter?” she inquired irritably. “You made me bite my tongue.”

“I bet I could make that A over into an L,” the old man said excitedly, without considering Miss Trot’s sufferings in the least. “That’s as fur’s I got on markin’ that boat of Kenneth’s, and ef he’s willin’ we could call it the ‘Lady Jane.’” He

Just Carol

started toward the kitchen door, but turned again and walked back, his face alight with eager imagination. "That name ought to make it a trim little craft, and bring it into smooth seas with favorin' breezes. And who knows but the 'Lady Jane' might find a 'Golden Fleece' as well as the 'Argo.'"

In spite of her devotion to Jane Miss Trot regarded him coldly. She disapproved of these fanciful flights in which she could not always follow.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about, and I don't believe you do either," she said sternly. "Besides, you're dirtyin' my kitchen floor trampin' 'round so. Good-night."

Mr. Chope responded meekly, and picked up his feet and his kindling-basket with such conscious promptness that the girl's heart was touched.

"I think Lady Jane would be a beautiful name for anything," she observed calmly just before he got out of hearing.

CHAPTER VII

MIXED PICKLES

Two days after the storm the wind which had blown so fiercely died away to a warm, caressing breath which made one feel that summer had really arrived.

Jane came in from a run in the garden with Rags to find the family already at the breakfast-table.

"Mother, who was it who said he had a 'half-warmed fish' in his mind when he meant a half-formed wish?" she inquired blithely. "Well, I've got one and I don't dare to wholly 'warm' it for fear you'll say no. Oh, please say yes, mother darling."

"How can she when she doesn't know what kind of a fish it is?" giggled Kenneth.

"Guess," responded his sister. "It's big, and smooth, and rough, and white and almost black, and greeny-blue and ——"

"Sounds like a bumped elbow," David interrupted. "I bet I can guess, though. Besides all you've said, it's cold and sparkling and foamy ——"

Mixed Pickles

"Ho! Ginger ale!" exploded Kenneth. "No, that couldn't be 'cause ginger ale is never black and blue."

"I know. It's the ocean," Judy asserted with a confident smile. "Do you think we might go to the beach to-day, mumsey? It's real summer, you know."

"I think we might," assented mother directly, not stopping to say any of the doubtful hesitating things that spoil one's pleasure. "This afternoon; when work and lessons are done."

There was a hollow groan from Jane. "That's why I was afraid to warm that fish any more," she explained disgustedly. "Do we have to give up a perfectly rare, beautiful, peach of a morning like this, when we're all just perishing to see the beach, and we've waited a whole week for a good day?" If one might judge by the tragic intensity of Jane's tone and manner, a decision contrary to her ideas would be an irreparable misfortune.

"Mother dearest," Jane went on coaxingly, "we don't have any lessons on Saturdays, so why can't we just tip this week a little and spill each day's lessons on to the next day. That will leave Monday, which is this most gorgeous day, free, and by Saturday it will rain again, and Davy and I shall just love having lessons."

David gazed anxiously at his mother as if he

Jane Stuart, Twin

supported this fair-minded plea with all his heart; Judy, who sat beside her, smoothed her sleeve with a pleading hand.

"You know, children," began Mrs. Stuart hesitatingly, "you know it is always a great deal easier for me to say yes than no ——"

"Jubilation!" shouted Kenneth with untimely joy. "I knew she would!"

"But," went on his mother, ignoring the interruption, and trying to look sternly at the interrupter, "I've turned over a new leaf, and I'm going to make my children helpful and responsible and useful if I pos-sib-ly can. There isn't much to be said for people who aren't useful in one way or another in this world, and we'll never get anywhere if we begin by neglecting the things we ought to do the first time they interfere with something we want more."

Mrs. Stuart glanced from one to another of the four sober faces, and for a moment no one said a word. "Of course I can't do much with that leaf I've turned unless you all help me keep it down," she said at last suggestively. "I'm not very strong-minded, I'm afraid, and it's much easier for me to let you do the things you want to do, and ——"

"Mother! You're strong-minded enough for me!" Kenneth pushed back his chair noisily,

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and ran around the table to give his mother a hug. "You can think up the biggest, hardest things for me to do, and I'll do 'em." He straightened himself sturdily, secretly wishing there were lions lurking on the way to the barn, or something of that kind.

"Of course it will be much nicer to go in the afternoon," observed Jane with airy insincerity. "I don't see why David should have insisted on going this morning. That boy has such queer ideas."

As usual she was stirred to the depths of her soul when her mother made an appeal like this, but she hated to show what she was feeling. So far she had done all the household tasks that had been assigned to her without openly murmuring, yet up to this moment she had not felt sure how long this lamb-like state of mind might last. Now, with her mother's words ringing in her ear, she was convinced that she should always do and be just what this beloved parent wanted.

"Tr-r-aitor! I'll get even with you," said David, tweaking his sister's hair as they rose from the table. "Mother, why can't we start as soon as lessons are done, and take our lunch over there? And would you mind if I asked Rob Randall to come with us? He's out of school on account of his eyes. He wanted to take me over there last

Jane Stuart, Twin

week, but I told him we'd all promised to go together the first time."

"Oh, my goodness me, not my speckled hen boy!" exclaimed Jane aghast. "I shall laugh in his face when I'm introduced to him. I know I shall."

"Why, I think it will be lovely to ask him," said mother, who always liked to know her children's friends. "And, Janey, you can't avoid your next door neighbor all summer."

"I s'pose not," said Jane meekly, "and I may as well get it over."

"Any one would think you were going to have a tooth out," said Kenneth. "Rob's a dandy fellow. He showed me all over his hen-house the other day."

"Well, anyway, Jane tried to give him a few points on how to take care of his hens," chuckled David, and then fled around the table pursued by his irate sister.

"Now scatter, children, and get your work done," said Mrs. Stuart, "and we'll all meet at nine o'clock for lessons. I must go now and plan with Mr. Chope about our picnic."

Jane worked and studied with all her might, and finished her lessons a half hour earlier than usual. Just as she closed the last book a pleasing idea filled her mind to the exclusion of everything

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else. She scribbled something hastily on a half-sheet of paper, folded it into a cocked hat and tip-toed around the table to the place where her mother was sitting.

"A note for you, Mrs. Stuart," she said softly.

Mother unfolded the crackling paper, trying not to disturb the other pupils, who were having a wonderful moment of perfect absorption in their work.

"Beloved Parent and Respected Teacher," the note began.

"Could you find it in your gentle heart to grant your che-ild a favor? Please, mum, may I run over to Carol's house now and ask her to go with us this afternoon? Do not crush your timid daughter's spirit by refusing.

"Yours respectfully,

" 'LITTLE JANEY.' "

"Go, by all means, my 'timid little Janey,' unless you think you are too fragile to walk so far," wrote Mrs. Stuart hurriedly, and with a smile handed the note back to her daughter, who was standing by her side making a pretense of meek submission to any fate. Jane glanced at it, dropped a kiss on the top of her mother's head and with a murmured, "Thanks, respected teacher," slipped silently from the room.

This morning, for the first time since her ar-

Jane Stuart, Twin

rival, Jane felt at peace with the world, and admitted to herself that she was beginning to like Belhaven. "It's because I know a girl," she thought as she ran down-stairs and out of the front door, without stopping to put on a hat.

She caught a glimpse of Susan looking out of the kitchen window as she flew past the house, and unconsciously her forehead puckered into a frown. Miss Trot was rather a problem. It made Jane uneasy to be put upon a pedestal and admired so much that she never had a chance to get off.

An enticing spring breeze blew her hair into her eyes and made her cheeks pink as she turned into the broad driveway leading up to Mr. Heath's house. It was the first time she had stepped beyond the wall of shrubbery which outlined the grounds, and, just for a second, she was appalled by the extent of the wonderful lawn which stretched between the entrance and the big house.

"Mercy! I feel as if I ought to go back and get on the very best dress I own," she said to herself, looking with dismay at the simple khaki suit she was wearing. Then, to her comfort, it occurred to her that Carol had come to see her as unceremoniously as possible, and hadn't seemed to think about clothes at all.

She kept steadily on around the curving drive-

Mixed Pickles

way, with feet which met the ground more firmly than they had when she had first left her own house. Then, with lessons done and mother pleased, with a picnic in prospect and a girl to invite, she had walked on air. Now—well, everything was just the same now, she had to acknowledge, but a curious feeling of doubt, which she couldn't at all understand, had crept into her mind.

Just as she rounded the last curve an automobile swept from somewhere back of the house and stopped at the entrance. At almost the same moment the front door opened, and a lady came out, followed by Carol and a maid bearing robes and cushions.

At sight of her new friend's dainty trimness, Jane was suddenly conscious that she, herself, had no hat, and that her hair wouldn't keep out of her eyes. To add to her dismay, she stepped suddenly on something, and almost tripped. It was her shoe-ribbon, which had taken this particular moment to come untied. Jane counted a great deal on first impressions, and she couldn't bear persons who weren't properly buttoned and tied.

Her courage was at a low ebb, for she hated to meet Carol's mother just at this time, but there was nothing to do except to keep on toward the automobile, and make the best of it. All at once she realized two things; the lady had put up a

Jane Stuart, Twin

lorgnette in order to look at her, and Carol was neither waving nor smiling. In fact she was gazing at her moodily, almost as if she had never seen her before.

Jane's knees shook, but she grasped the remnant of her sinking courage and thanked her lucky stars that her voice didn't stick in her throat.

"Good-morning," she began, putting on a cheerfulness she was far from feeling. "I don't believe you really know me yet, Carol. I'm Jane Stuart ——"

"Oh, yes," the other girl interrupted without any of the enthusiasm Jane expected. "Mother, this is Jane Stuart. You know I went to see her last Saturday."

Mrs. Heath's long-handled eye-glass took in her daughter's friend from head to foot. "How do you do, Miss Jane," she said in a tired voice that made Jane feel shivery. "Won't you come in?"

Jane didn't know whether she meant come into the automobile where Mrs. Heath was already installed, or into the house, but neither prospect tempted her.

"No, thank you," she answered politely. "Mother said I might run over and ask Carol to go to the beach with us this afternoon. We're going to have our lunch there ——"

Mixed Pickles

Jane stopped short, because just at that moment she was convinced that the girl she was looking at could not possibly be the same girl who had entered so joyously into their pleasures on Saturday. The eyes of this one were somber, her mouth almost sullen, her whole expression unresponsive.

“Would you like to go to the beach, Carol?” asked Mrs. Heath languidly. “You’re very kind, I’m sure, to ask her.”

“No. I don’t think so. Thank you for the invitation,” and then to Jane’s utter bewilderment Carol turned eyes swimming with tears upon her, and got into the automobile without a word.

Jane was thankful that there was nothing left for her but to go home. She stopped to tie her shoe, and didn’t even look up when the machine passed her on its way to the gate.

Five minutes later she was telling her mother and David about it. “I was never so snubbed in all my life,” she said with almost tearful indignation. “I supposed Carol would be just as jolly and chummy as she was last Saturday, and she looked cross enough to—to chew tin. And when that woman put up her spy-glass, and looked me all over I could feel my hair stand up, and that wretched shoe-string flap. Oh, it was perfectly awful!”

“Don’t you mind, Lady Jane. Rob Randall’s

Jane Stuart, Twin

going, and we'll let you chum with us," consoled David.

"Oh, I know. Boys are all right, of course. But I thought I'd found a girl I should like so much, and now I've lost her again. Well, such is life!" and Jane gazed out of the window at the spring landscape which for her, at least, had lost some of its charm.

Even when the "Stuart procession," as Kenneth called it, was ready to start, her cheerfulness was still under a cloud. She had liked Carol so much at first sight, and now she should never know what to depend upon. It would be some fun, of course, to meet a new boy, though probably he and David would be so taken up with each other that she should feel rather out of it.

Mr. Chope and the amiable Sally started off ahead of the others, and Judy, tempted by the promise of being allowed to drive, had been persuaded to go in the carriage. Mr. Chope had certain mysterious plans which he had confided to Mrs. Stuart, and to which she had given a pleased consent.

The other four members of the family left the house together, Jane and David a little in advance.

"There's Rob," said David, as they approached the house where the Randalls lived, and Jane's

Mixed Pickles

eager gaze fell at once on the boy she had seen before. Not even the dark glasses could wholly obscure the jolly good-nature of his face, and he came hurrying down the path as if he were anxious to make friends with them all as soon as possible.

“Now, mother, please be all ready to speak to him,” begged David anxiously, “and you, too, Jane, because you know I get rattled when I have to introduce people.”

Rob’s arms were filled with parcels, at sight of which Mrs. Stuart exclaimed reproachfully, “Why, David, I told you to say that we should have lunch enough for everybody.”

“I did, mother. I warned him not to bring a single thing.”

Under ordinary circumstances the walk from the Randalls’ back door to the gate seemed short and perfectly easy of accomplishment. To-day, however, under the eyes of strangers, Robert found the way beset with difficulties.

In the first place it dawned on him that he should have put his various packages in a basket or box, and this idea made him suddenly self-conscious. Then the bag of oranges under his right arm would keep slipping, and he could only hitch it back into place again, because in one hand he held a paper bag filled with hard-boiled eggs,

Jane Stuart, Twin

and in the other a loaf of cake done up in paraffine paper. This neat and sanitary cover had seemed a last touch of elegance to him before he left the house, but now his pleasure in it was dimmed. It was a grim satisfaction to squeeze under his left arm a jar of pickles which felt comfortingly substantial.

"Say, I thought I told you not to bring anything," called David in a tone of cheerful good-fellowship intended to put his friend at ease immediately.

Robert never knew exactly what he did in response, but, in thinking it over afterward, he fancied he must have tried to wave the hand that held the eggs. At any rate, just as he reached the expected party at the gate the bottom came out of that bag which was too heavily weighted. At the same instant he stubbed his toe and leaped wildly in the air.

By some miracle he managed to regain his balance without going down, but the mischief was done. There was a rain of oranges, and a crash of glass as the jar of pickles hurtled through the air and ended its flight on a stone.

"I've caught something," cried Jane joyously, ducking her head to avoid an orange.

"And these teenty pickles won't have to be wasted, either." Kenneth was industriously pick-

Mixed Pickles

ing them up as he spoke. "It'll all come off in the wash."

"Mother—Jane—this is Robert Randall," said David who was choking with laughter, but trying hard to be politely serious. He was so little acquainted with this new friend that he couldn't be sure how he would take such a mishap as this. "I guess you know my kid brother, Rob."

"Mrs. Stuart, this is the way I always meet strangers," said the boy, turning very red, but doing his best to act as if nothing had happened. "I fancy it makes 'em remember me. Now won't you please all laugh? I know you want to, and it won't fuss me a bit."

It needed only this permission to send David off into fits of helpless laughter in which Kenneth joined at once. Mrs. Stuart and Jane held out a moment longer, but the situation was too much for them.

"It was too funny when those oranges flew wildly around," Jane gasped when she could find her voice. "And Davy's expression when the pickle jar shot by him! And your face all the time! Oh, it almost makes up for that wretched speckled hen!"

Rob threw back his head with a ringing laugh. "Let's call it square," he said. "Anyway, you saved the cake," he went on, taking the package

Jane Stuart, Twin

she had caught and feeling of it with some anxiety. "Mother wouldn't have forgiven me if that had been spoiled, for she made it expressly for this party. I remember now that she told me to put everything in a basket, but she had to go to the city and I forgot."

The rueful face turned to Mrs. Stuart found favor in her sight at once. The boy was a little older than her twins, she decided in her quick estimate, and she liked his humorous smile and frank, pleasant manner.

"It was very kind of your mother to add to our lunch," she responded in her friendliest manner, "and I'm sure we never had blessings showered upon us in such an open-handed fashion before. Now let's pick up everything that's unspoiled and washable, and forward march."

"Before that happened I was as blue as a blue moon, whatever that may be," said Jane gayly, as they all started along the road, "and now I'm quite happy again."

"Which shows how much we all like to get even," David remarked with great wisdom.

"Well, of course, I only did it to give you a chance." Robert put on a virtuous expression which seemed to indicate that he was always ready to sacrifice himself for others. "But why were you blue? Don't you like Belhaven?"

Mixed Pickles

"Yes—no—well, I've liked it part of the time to-day. But I don't know any girls, and in Sterling I knew so many, and I miss them dreadfully."

Jane's tone was more appealing than she realized, and the boy swinging along at her side looked down at her with a sympathy she did not see.

"The girls here won't let you alone as soon as they begin to get acquainted," he said with an emphasis that fell pleasantly on Jane's ear. "But you already know Carol Heath, don't you?"

"I—I thought I did. Just now I don't feel quite certain. Let's not talk about it. It turns me into a blue moon again. Davy, I'll race you to the fifth tree," and Jane was off like a young Atalanta with David and Kenneth in eager pursuit.

Robert fell into step with Mrs. Stuart. "It wouldn't do for me to spill this lunch again," he remarked with comical anxiety. "Jane can most certainly run, can't she? Hi, there, David's passing her. No, she's ahead still. Go it, Davy. Don't let a girl beat you even if she did have the start. Go on, boy. Jingo, she's touched the tree. That was a pretty run all right, if a girl did win."

The victor, flushed and breathless, was retying a hair-ribbon when they reached her.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Jane is splendid in a short dash," she heard her mother saying as they approached, "but I fancy that David would do better than she in anything that required persistency and endurance."

Jane shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She had an idea that mother wasn't thinking of just running races when she said that. Then she turned her face eagerly toward the beach. "I can begin to smell the ocean," she proclaimed; "let's hurry."

They had left the town some distance behind them by this time, and now there were only scattering houses and fewer trees.

"When we get over that next little hill," said Robert, "you'll see the beach."

"We haven't seen the ocean since Jane and I were small and too young to remember about it," David said thoughtfully.

"I feel rather queer, and a little bit shivery," confessed Jane, snuggling close to her mother as they walked along. "The way you do when you're going to be introduced to some very big person you've heard a great deal about, and are a little afraid of."

Mother put an arm around her in quick appreciation of her mood, and started to speak, but a sudden question from David interrupted her.

Mixed Pickles

“What does that smoke come from?” he was asking perplexedly.

“Where? I don’t see any,” demanded Kenneth, spinning around like a top in his effort to look in all directions at once.

Jane heard vaguely what they were saying, but her whole attention was absorbed in something else, for they were just reaching the little hill Robert had pointed out, and in another moment the ocean, sparkling in the sunshine, with long slow waves curling into foam, lay before her.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE SHORE

JUST at first Jane's beauty-loving eyes could only look and look, and grow very big and full of wonder. Then, calling upon her twin for sympathy as she always did in the exciting moments of her life, she cried rapturously :

"Oh, Spinksy, isn't it great? See what glorious rocks there are to climb. Why, you never told us half how beautiful it is, mother."

"How could I? It's indescribable," answered her mother quickly, turning from her long look at the ocean to gaze at Jane's radiant face. Something she found there was eminently satisfying, for she again put her arm around her daughter, and drew her close. "Janey, you're a darling to love it so much," she said, so softly that no one else could hear. "I should have been disappointed if you hadn't felt it—the way I do."

"Mother, I always want to feel things the way you do," whispered Jane fervently. Then with one of her quick, characteristic changes, "Isn't

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this the most hungrifying air? Do you suppose these nice, clean pebbles are good to eat?"

By this time they had walked over the large stones, which rolled and slid under their feet, and had come to the deep, shifting sand, glistening like gold. A little to the left of where they were was a small, rough shelter, near which Sally stood, placidly munching her dinner from a bag hung around her neck. The tide was coming in, but there was still an expanse of wet, shining sand, and there, near the water, Mr. Chope and Judy were engaged in some absorbing occupation. They could hear faintly Judy's shrieks as she fled from the waves that threatened her.

There was a sudden shout from Kenneth, who dropped into the soft sand and began to take off shoes and stockings in excited haste.

"I've got to see what Judy and Mr. Chope are doing," he announced breathlessly. "Please keep my things, mother." He was off in a moment, treading carefully at first because the warm sand and pebbles felt strange to his feet. Then reaching a firm smooth surface he gave a wild whoop of joy, and swung his arms, and, between leaping and running, covered the distance until he, too, became a small, mysterious figure.

"We call this Mr. Chope's beach," said Rob, "because he put up that shelter, and he loves to come

Jane Stuart, Twin

over here for a clam —— By jingo, I believe he was coming back from here when I met him this morning. I wonder ——” he interrupted himself to run around to the other side of the shelter.

“He’s got his clam-hole started now,” he called back excitedly. “Just look here.”

They all followed eagerly to find a mound of seaweed from which ascended a column of steamy smoke.

“The moment I mentioned picnic to Mr. Chope this morning, he said it was low tide, and he would come right over and dig the clams,” said Mrs. Stuart, smiling at Jane’s puzzled expression.

“But what—where—I don’t see anything that looks good to eat,” protested Jane.

“That’s because you probably don’t have clam-bakes in your part of the country,” Robert answered with a superior air. “First Mr. Chope made a hole and lined it with big stones. After that he built a fire on the stones and got ’em sizzling hot. Then he took off the ashes, and put seaweed on the hot stones, and clams on the seaweed, and then more seaweed ——”

“Humph! It doesn’t sound particularly good,” interrupted Jane, with her nose in the air. She was bound to take down this conceited New England boy if she could.

“You wait and see,” laughed Robert. “There

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comes Mr. Chope now. I warn you not to let him know your opinion of a clambake, for he'd be heart-broken."

"We've been having a great time with that playful old ocean," called Mr. Chope as soon as they got within speaking distance. "And this young lady," he paused to look quizzically at Judy, "found some red in the air, and livened up her cheeks."

"Oh, mother, I've got the dearest little shells," cried Judy, with an enthusiasm new to the family, "and Mr. Chope is going to show me how to make holes through them and string a necklace."

"Why, Judy, you really do look almost pretty," declared Kenneth, as if he had seen her for the first time. "Your cheeks are pink, and your eyes are shiny. Why, mother—Jane—just look at her."

"It was lovely, mother," said Judy, pretending not to notice this frank praise, but secretly resolving to give Kenneth her biggest sand-dollar. "You could stand right still, and your feet would sink down—down."

"You see she and I got over here a consid'able time before you did," Mr. Chope went on. "Sally seemed to feel kinder young in her jints, and she came over the road lively, so to speak."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"We caught up with a man on a bicycle and passed him, didn't we, Mr. Chope?" asserted Judy proudly.

"We did." Mr. Chope confirmed the statement with great seriousness, but a dawning twinkle heralded the approach of a smile. "To be sure, one of his tires was 'most flat to the ground, but Sally warn't accountable for that.

"And now is any one hungry?" he went on, turning a gaze of proud ownership toward the mound of smoking seaweed. "Of course this ain't a real, so to speak, clambake," he hastened to add, "'cause May's most too early for it, and we haven't got any corn, or chicken or fish or sweet potatoes. But I guess the clams and some common, ordinary potatoes will taste good to these boys."

"Please, please don't leave out the girls," pleaded Jane, clasping her hands imploringly. "I'm famished. I feel as if I hadn't had anything to eat for years."

"Bless your heart." Mr. Chope was manifestly agitated by Jane's sudden appeal. "You and the other ladies set right down by that table in my little clam-house, and we boys'll wait on you."

"Nothing would please Jane better," affirmed David solemnly, "than to sit down and be waited on like a princess."

Jane made up a little face at him. "Twin

On the Shore

brothers know so much," she retorted with good-natured sarcasm.

"Help me get out our part of the lunch, Jane," called mother, who had begun to busy herself with the baskets. "Judy, you can put these wooden plates and paper napkins on the table. Those are treasures Miss Trot unearthed from somewhere."

"Why, mother," began Jane, a sudden picture of Miss Trot, all alone at home, filling her mind, "do you think we ought ——" she looked up to find that her mother wasn't near her and hadn't heard. "I suppose I ought to be sorry we didn't think of her, but I'm not," she confessed to herself, rather ashamed of her selfishness. "She's an awfully nice girl, of course, but I don't seem to know just what to do with her."

"I told Susan she might come with us," said her mother's voice with a suddenness that surprised Jane. She wondered if mother could read her mind.

"She's such a faithful little thing she wouldn't consent to leave the house alone," Mrs. Stuart went on. "Put those sandwiches on right in the napkin, Jane. Now, I think we're quite ready for Mr. Chope."

Jane gazed eagerly while Mr. Chope raked aside the steaming seaweed and took out the hot potatoes and clams.

Jane Stuart, Twin

She refused firmly to eat one of the latter at first ; then, watching Robert, who sat next to her, she was fascinated by the expert way in which he extracted the clam from its shell, and dipped it in the melted butter which Mr. Chope provided so lavishly.

"It looks so good. I just can't stand it," she said at last with an expression of great resolution, and under Rob's guidance proceeded to make her first attempt.

"Oh me, oh my!" she exclaimed rapturously, the deed having been safely accomplished for the first time, "don't bother to talk to me now. I'm busy."

Mr. Chope, going back and forth between the mound of seaweed and the table, beamed benignly on Jane as her heap of clam-shells grew in height. Already she had forged a second link in the chain which bound him to her.

"Jane, remember that we're going to walk over and climb those rocks," said David suddenly, eyeing his sister in pretended alarm. "And there isn't any elevator for stout people."

"I've had all I can eat," answered Jane. "I could almost purr, I'm so contented. And you can't talk, Mr. Spinksy ; your heap is as high as mine, and Robert's is higher ; and mother's—why, look at mother's, Davy. I never knew her to eat so much."

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“Kinder felt’s if you was eatin’ old friends, didn’t you, Mis’ Stuart?” inquired Mr. Chope genially. “Well, now, I didn’t egzactly mean that,” he protested, joining cheerfully in the laugh which followed his remark. “But you children don’t understand yit that a love like that your mother feels for the seashore and everythin’ that belongs to it never gits out of your mind. Now to me a ship, a three-master, with her sails all flung to the breeze, and her nose a-plowin’ through the water means more ——” he stopped suddenly, and gazed out over the ocean with an expression in his bright, old eyes which kept the children quite silent for a moment.

“Have you made many voyages, Mr. Chope?” asked David. “I wish you’d tell me about them some day.”

The old man came back to a consciousness of his surroundings with a sudden start. “Well, no; not, so to speak, many,” he murmured, looking curiously ill at ease. “No, I shouldn’t really call it many.” And then a sudden fit of coughing seized him, and he shuffled away from the little group, and busied himself in retying Sally with a pretense of great absorption.

“Suppose we clear everything away now,” suggested Mrs. Stuart, “and then you three older ones may go for your climb on the rocks

Jane Stuart, Twin

if you like, and I'll stay here with Judy and Ken."

The clearing away was quick work, with so many to help, and then David spread a carriage robe on the sand, and weighted its corners with rocks, and extracted some cushions from Sally's carriage, and finally ensconced his mother there in great state with a book and umbrella.

"Now you and Judy play where mother can see you without having to get up and hunt around," he said persuasively to Kenneth, who with Judy had already begun a search for stones with a white ring around them, which she called lucky stones.

"All right, your Majesty," answered Kenneth, with a military salute. "We'll take care of her, but don't you be gone too long. Judy and I don't want all the responsibility." The last word was a mouthful, but he brought it out with great care, and quite to his own satisfaction, secretly hoping that David was duly impressed.

When David caught up with Jane and Robert they had started a hot discussion in regard to the relative merits of Eastern and Western cities which lasted all the way to the rocky bluff, and left each of them in no way changed by the other's point of view. Jane, in fact, felt distinctly irritated by the obstinacy of this youth, who appeared not to feel the force of her very best arguments, and

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would persist in thinking his own small portion of the United States better than any other. Suddenly it occurred to her that her own feeling in regard to Sterling was a precisely similar one, and she couldn't help laughing.

"What sillies we are to talk this way," she said frankly, as Rob extended a hand to help her over a wide fissure between the rocks. "We shouldn't get anywhere if we argued a thousand years. Let's not do it any more."

"Shake on it," agreed Rob, secretly approving her good sense, and vowing not to tease her again in this way unless it should be necessary for her discipline.

"After all, it's one big country, and it belongs to all of us whole—not in little chopped-up sections," added David, who could be depended upon to be patriotic whenever there was the slightest excuse.

They were climbing steadily now, Rob leading, Jane going between the two boys, so that both might help her in time of need.

"There," said Rob, as they reached a point about half-way up the cliff, "now we'll rest a little. You get a splendid view from here of the hotel at the other end of the beach. Of course it's closed now, but people come from all around in summer. Mrs. Eliot has been there two or three summers."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Mrs. Eliot?" repeated Jane vaguely. "Oh, you mean our Aunt Caroline. You see we're not used to her other name. We've never met her—nor Mr. Eliot."

"He's a winner, all right," Rob responded briefly. "Now, David, do you want to go any higher? It's too hard climbing for Jane to go, but you and I can manage it."

"Well, I like that," protested Jane, who strongly objected to being disposed of in this summary manner. "Spinksy, you know I've always climbed wherever you could."

"Yes, but David doesn't know what's ahead of him on these rocks, and I do," Rob persisted. "I just wouldn't risk taking a girl along."

"Never mind," began David; "we can go some other time, Rob. I ——"

"Go on and climb, and I'll wait," said Jane with her usual impetuosity. "Don't you remember, Spinksy Stuart, that mother has expressly forbidden you to give up to me all the time? And don't hurry because you think I shall be lonesome, for I shan't miss either one of you a bit."

With which parting shot, Jane ignored the two boys and gazed out over the ocean with half-shut eyes. She found herself dreamily wishing for her sketch-book, and then smiled at the idea of even attempting to suggest with her pencil the wonder

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of sky and ocean, which lay within her gaze. She looked along the sandy beach until her eye found the hotel again.

"That boy must have thought it was strange that I didn't know my aunt's name the very first minute," she said to herself drowsily. "Somehow I don't seem to be getting acquainted with Aunt Caroline very fast. I suppose she doesn't care much for those thankful notes I've written her about the presents, and the trunks in the attic, but she might take a little notice of her affectionate grandniece, Jane Stuart, Esquire."

Jane's eyes closed sleepily, but she opened them again with a little jerk. "If I could only find 'little Caroline' for her," she reflected, returning involuntarily to the thought which was so often in her mind. "It's pretty hard to be a detective, though, when you've detected the only orphan there is and she doesn't fit."

David had left his coat in his sister's care, and she made a pillow of it now, and snuggling down as comfortably as she could on so rocky a couch, laid her head on the improvised cushion. It was warm on the sun-baked rocks, the far-away roar of the waves on the beach was distinctly soothing, and the bright light made it pleasanter to shut her eyes.

Suddenly she sat up and looked about her with a half-startled gaze. "Somebody said 'Jane,'"

Jane Stuart, Twin

she announced with sleepy decision, and then coming more fully awake, she listened expectantly. For a moment she heard nothing. Then the voice came again, high-pitched and appealing, "Jane! Jane Stuart! Where are you?"

It was a girl's voice, Jane knew, but for an instant she had no idea to whom it belonged. Then, scrambling to her feet in a hurry, she called excitedly, "I'm here. Is it Carol? Come on up."

"I can't; I've got on high-heeled shoes, and my ankle turns every other minute," answered Carol with a plaintive note in her voice.

"I'll come down then," and Jane began to make her way carefully over the rocks, feeling really proud of the skill with which she managed the difficult places where the boys had helped her in coming up.

"I've actually been asleep," she said when she came within sight of Carol. "The boys left me, and it was so warm, and I'd eaten so many clams. How did you know where to find me?"

"I saw your mother and she told me. I came over to the beach in the machine," the other girl explained briefly. As she said the last words Jane gave a flying leap to the ground, and both of Carol's hands came out to meet her.

"Oh, Jane, Jane," she began, with a little unsteady smile which touched her new friend's warm



“DON’T YOU EVER QUARREL?”

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heart at once, "are you really going to be nice to me when I was so horrid this morning?"

"Why, of course I am," laughed Jane, feeling almost embarrassed by Carol's extreme humility, and loyally certain that there must have been some very good reason for her queerness that morning. "Spinksy always says I never can stay mad. And I wasn't really provoked, either. I was just—well, just puzzled."

"Of course you were." Carol's expression was penitence itself. "Let's go and sit down on the beach. The sand is softer than the rocks, and we can put our backs against that old boat."

Once settled there the time seemed ripe for confidences, and Jane waited with an evident expectancy that forced the other girl to speak.

"It was mean of me to take it out on you," she said at last unwillingly, "but when I've been having a quarrel with mother I just don't care whether I'm nice to any one else or not."

"A quarrel—with your mother," Jane repeated unbelievably. She knew to her sorrow that girls were sometimes very disagreeable to their mothers, but a quarrel meant two, and —

"Why, yes." Carol interrupted her thoughts with a little laugh, half ashamed, half defiant. "Don't you ever quarrel with your mother? We do it often at our house."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"I'm very hateful sometimes," Jane confessed honestly. "But there never could be a real quarrel, because—well, because mother wouldn't."

"My mother would, and that's the difference." Carol spoke in a low voice and turned her head away quickly, but Jane was sure there were tears in her eyes.

She wished vainly that she could think of something comforting to say. She had been so little attracted by the languid lady in the automobile that it was easy to believe that she wouldn't be the very nicest kind of a mother to have.

"Oh, Jane, sometimes I'm so miserable. And when I see an own mother like yours ——" Carol stopped suddenly. "I didn't mean to tell that she isn't my own mother. I never have before. Don't you hate people who talk over their family affairs?" she went on almost crossly. Then with another quick change of mood, "My father is such a darling, and he doesn't know how unhappy I am."

Jane's heart, which had throbbed a degree faster at the beginning of Carol's speech, settled back to its normal steadiness again. She was thankful that she had not impulsively cried "orphan," and demanded information as to Carol's birth-place. It was evidently a case of not liking one's stepmother.

"It's good that you're so fond of your father,

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isn't it?" she ventured, not knowing in the least what to say.

"It's my greatest comfort," Carol answered quickly. "But then his business takes him away from us a great deal. Sometimes—when I see a real heart-mother—like yours—I feel as if I couldn't stand my life another minute."

Jane looked into the mournful eyes with obvious sympathy. She felt as if there were two Carols, and they both appealed to her in their different ways. She longed to know more about it all, but she could never bear to ask questions that people might not like to answer.

"I'm awfully sorry you're so unhappy," she said at last with a little sigh. "It makes you seem ever so much more grown up than I am to have so much—so much sorrow in your life."

"I shall be fifteen on my next birthday." It didn't seem necessary to Carol to explain that she had passed her fourteenth birthday only a week before this.

"David and I are going to be fourteen in June, but we're big for our age, and every one thinks we are older. At least every one thinks David is, because he takes so much care of the rest of us."

As though in response to her thought of him, David's voice called with startling suddenness:

"Jane! Jane! Where on earth are you?"

Jane Stuart, Twin

Anxiety was so evident in his tone that Jane sprang to her feet and brushed the sand from her dress in guilty haste. For the first time she realized that she and Carol had been completely hidden from any one on the rocks.

"I'm here, Spinksy," she called quickly; "behind this boat."

Carol grasped her arm just before they left the shelter of the boat. "Promise you won't tell a word of what I've said."

"Not even to mother and David?" asked Jane under her breath.

"Not any one. And don't mention it even to me unless I do first. Please promise, Jane. You'll make me very unhappy if you don't."

"I promise," said Jane, feeling very important and mysterious.

"Mrs. Janes, you've nearly scared the life out of me," began David in an aggrieved tone. "When I found my coat there looking like a pillow I was sure you'd gone to sleep and had rolled off the — Oh, hello, Carol. Where did you come from?"

"The tide brought me in," answered Carol with so surprising a return of her gay manner that Jane looked at her in astonishment. "How do you do, Mr. Robert Randall? Aren't you going to speak to me?"

"Just waiting for the chance. Every one else

On the Shore

talks so much I never can get a word in. How do you do, Miss Carol Heath? Are you going to honor Belhaven with your presence all summer?"

"My goodness, aren't we stylish and ceremonious? I think I'll talk to David. That is, if he'll stay as he is, and not turn into something else, as he did the first time I met him."

David smiled uncomfortably. He wasn't at all sure what another boy might think of his dressing up like a girl. "I believe we ought to be going back now," he suggested. "We've left mother and the kids alone quite a while."

For the remainder of the afternoon Jane's mind did double duty. To outward view she was as light-hearted and talkative as ever, but underneath everything she was thinking about what she had been told. She decided that Carol was a real heroine, and she loved the way she took part in all they did and said, and didn't show for a moment how desperately unhappy she was.

Going home in the carriage on the front seat with Mr. Chope and Kenneth, Jane fell into so unwonted a silence that the old man looked at her inquisitively more than once. Carol was sitting on the back seat, and talking with Mrs. Stuart and Judy in such an interesting, grown-up way that Jane felt sure mother must be delighted with her. David and Robert were walking home, and

Jane Stuart, Twin

pretty nearly keeping up with Sally, whose morning enthusiasm had departed.

Carol was left at the driveway entrance, and the Stuart family turned back, waving a good-bye to Rob, who had just reached his own gate.

Jane climbed out hastily when the carriage stopped, and turned to give a helping hand to mother and Judy. Then she picked a nice bunch of grass and held it temptingly before Sally.

"Give me an oracle, Sally," she said with a laugh, "and you shall have this nice, juicy grass."

Sally's nose twitched longingly, and she appeared to be considering. Suddenly she made a grab for the grass, and at the same instant a curious voice which appeared to issue from her very throat startled Jane.

"Don't be too confidin'," the voice warned, and Sally, chewing the tidbit which she had snatched, nodded her head slowly as if in confirmation.

"Mr. Chope, you said that. You're a—a ventriloquist," exclaimed Jane, flying back to the carriage, where the old man sat holding the reins with a care that was a compliment to Sally's activity. "Now what do you mean?"

Mr. Chope, looking at her with a placid smile, utterly ignored her question. "Did Sally nip you?" he inquired casually. "I'm 'fraid this orrycullin's gittin' on the old girl's nerves."

CHAPTER IX

BELHAVEN GIRLS

JANE was in her own room the next afternoon when the bell rang, and she heard Susan Trot come running up-stairs.

"She wants me, I do believe," she said to herself with instant conviction. "It's probably a girl." Even this quick forecast of a possible situation didn't prepare her, however, for Susan's announcement that there were three girls waiting for her in the library.

"Mercy me," she said to the interested Miss Trot, who never could resist the temptation to linger where Jane was. "Why do they all come in a bunch? It's much easier to get acquainted with one at a time. Do I look all right? I mustn't keep them waiting, I suppose."

"You look just lovely. And I wouldn't keep 'em waitin' long if I was you, because there's one of 'em that acts awful impatient. She was jumpin' up out of her chair and lookin' at things before I got out of the room."

Jane ran down the stairs with an odd feeling of nervousness. She was so used to meeting girls at

Jane Stuart, Twin

school, or in some informal way, that to be called on formally seemed almost an ordeal. All her ideas as to the ceremony of the call, however, vanished as soon as she entered the room, for a short, plump, dark-haired girl dashed forward and seized both her hands.

“My dear, we’ve all just been looking forward to this, and we thought it never would stop raining so we could put on the best clothes we have—which isn’t saying much, is it, girls?—and come over to see you. But we’ve thought of you every day, and—oh, I forgot, I’m Polly Reed, and this tall young person with the pretty brown eyes is Serena Holt, and the shrinking child on my right is Margaret Curtis, and ——”

“Polly, if you don’t stop talking so foolishly Peggy and I will never go anywhere with you again as long as we live,” interrupted the girl whom the voluble young person had called Serena. Then, turning to Jane, “We made her promise that she would behave before we would agree to come with her, and now look at her.”

“I—I like it,” confessed Jane smiling at all of them in her friendliest fashion. “Nothing has made me feel so much at home before as to hear a girl just gab—well, talk like that, you know.”

“Don’t mind my feelings. Say ‘gabble’ if you like. I’m used to being misjudged,” remarked

Belhaven Girls

Polly, with a resigned air. "But please, please, speak kindly to our little Daisy here. She's the 'wee, cowerin', timorous, crimson-tipped' daisy—methinks I've got two quotations mixed, but never mind. You've probably read those poems in school and you can separate them to suit the case. Anyway you're not a 'beastie,' are you, Margaret, dear?" She gazed with a smile of exaggerated sweetness at the small, fair girl, in whose cheeks the color was mounting.

"Polly, you're just unbearable," she said petulantly. "You know I hate being called Daisy. Won't you please call me Peggy, and may I say Jane?" She had turned to Jane with a friendly glance, and the latter responded warmly.

"Why, of course I will, and I shall be heart-broken if you don't all call me by my first name right away. And now, please sit down, and tell me where you all live and go to school, and what you do for good times, and whether there are many other girls as nice as you ——"

"Stop right there," interrupted the incorrigible Polly. "There are no others as nice as we are. And now, please go on. I want to prove to my dignified friends that I'm not the only one who can gab ——"

Jane laughed. "That's why I liked it in you, perhaps," she explained. "But I'm really going

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to keep still and let you talk, for I'm just wild to know about the girls in Belhaven."

"Being born and brought up here no one can tell you more about them than we can," began Peggy, but before she had a chance to go on, Polly was talking again, and then Serena, and finally all three were telling their absorbed audience three different items of interest at one and the same moment.

"It sounds as though you have awfully good times, though I am just a little mixed," Jane said with a sigh of intense satisfaction, "and it is so good to be with girls again. Why, I haven't had a girl to chum with for over two weeks. Except Carol, of course. I suppose you all know Carol Heath."

Jane felt the restraint which seemed to fall upon her three guests. Even the talkative Polly was silent for a moment. Then with a manner quite different from her previous one she answered soberly, "Yes, we all know her."

"You seem rather sad about it," laughed Jane. She didn't really know whether she ought to change the subject, or express the curiosity which she couldn't help feeling.

"We are," responded Peggy. "We're a little sad, and very mad, if you want the truth. You needn't look at me so sternly, Serena. I shouldn't have mentioned her if Jane hadn't."

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Serena, who had been the quietest of the three, turned to Jane with a troubled look in her brown eyes. "It doesn't seem like playing fair to talk about Carol, because for the first three summers she was here we four were such good chums," she explained.

"You may as well tell her the rest now," prompted Peggy. "If you don't you just leave her to imagine all sorts of things."

Serena, recognizing the justice of this remark, went on: "Well, you see last year she didn't seem to want us any more. When she came she brought two girls with her who stayed almost all summer, and she made us feel that she had only a—a bowing acquaintance with us."

"And not even that, sometimes," added Peggy hotly. "Sometimes she made me feel as small ——"

"Which wasn't at all necessary, was it, Pegs?" said Polly, to her friend's evident disgust. "Come on, let's talk about something else. It's almost time for us to go."

Jane refused to let them think of going. She wanted desperately to ask them on what terms they expected to meet Carol this year, but she could not bear to seem curious. She liked these girls already, and Carol had been such good fun the day they met. She wished so much they could all be chums together.

Jane Stuart, Twin

The girls chattered on, telling Jane something of school, and summer good times until Serena declared she must go. "I'm going to have some girls at the house next Saturday afternoon, Jane, and I'd like to have you come. I think I shall have to call it a getting-acquainted party for you, though it won't be really a party at all. Just girls, you know."

"I know. We used to have 'em in Sterling," said Jane happily. "I'd love to come, and I know mother will be glad I'm invited."

Watching her departing friends until a turn in the road hid them from sight, Jane felt a supreme content enfolding her. "Four girls and one boy in about a week. That's doing pretty well for little Jane," she said thoughtfully. "But then that week seemed a month long. Anyway, things have really started now, and I'm thankful."

"Mother, don't you think I ought to get out my white dress and have it pressed and ready for Saturday?" This was Wednesday, and Jane's quickness in learning her lessons had left time enough before dinner to look up the dress. She had a satisfying consciousness of wise forethought in beginning so early to prepare.

"Certainly, Janey. Find it, and put it on in my room, and by the time you are ready to be buttoned I'll be there."

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“Mother, did you ever see anything so ridiculous?” Jane was laughing at her reflection as she pirouetted before the mirror. “I don’t know whether you can button me or not. I’ve grown e-nor-mous-ly. And just see the length of it. Isn’t it too funny?”

Her mother looked at her in real dismay. “Why did you take this year to grow so—so violently?” she said when she had succeeded in getting the dress together.

“I don’t know.” Jane hadn’t begun to realize the seriousness of the situation, and there was laughter in her voice and a glint of amusement in her eyes. “I suppose I shall have to have a new one, shan’t I? Do you think you could buy one in Boston so that I could have it for Serena’s party?”

Mrs. Stuart gave her a quick glance in which surprise and perplexity were mingled, but Jane before the mirror, giving gentle pats and twitches to the dainty dress, was perfectly oblivious of the difficulties in her path until the delay in her mother’s response made her turn.

“Why, mother, what’s the matter?” she asked hastily. “Does your head ache?”

“No, Janey, I was thinking about the dress. I wish I knew more about such things myself.”

“Oh, we can surely find some one here who

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will sew for us just as Miss Torrey did in Sterling, and this will make over beautifully for Judy."

"But, Jane, you don't seem to understand that in spite of the fact that we have a good home and a great deal to make us comfortable it isn't easy for me to find the money to buy clothes just now," explained Mrs. Stuart, wishing with all her heart that she could grant her daughter's request. "We can't have a seamstress the way we used to, and if your dresses are not right you and I must make them so. Why, Janey, I thought all our clothes would seem new here, and I forgot my tall girl was shooting up at such a rate."

Mother laughed and tried to make it seem as if the situation were something of a joke, but Jane's eyes gazing steadily out of the window didn't brighten. The thought was uppermost in her mind that before this moment she had not realized how much conditions had changed. She had taken it for granted that the things she considered necessary for her happiness would come to her in some way. It was going to be hardest for her, she thought. The boys wouldn't mind about clothes for a long time, and Judy had neither outworn nor outgrown her dresses. It was worse just now, of course, when she wanted to make a good impression upon all these new acquaintances. A sudden wave of self-pity swept over her, and she turned

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quickly away from her mother to find herself confronted by a photograph of David which stood on the bureau. It was a particularly good likeness of him, and his frank, earnest gaze met her own steadfastly.

"Jane," mother's voice was very gentle, but her daughter felt the decision which lay behind it, "you are too fair-minded, I know, to wish me to spend money on you at the expense of the other children, even if I would. You don't realize, of course, how much money it takes to educate children, and that we must always have something ready in case one of us should be ill."

Mrs. Stuart paused for a moment and the room was very still. She looked anxiously at Jane, but the averted face and rigid figure told her nothing. Then she saw the photograph on which her daughter's gaze was fixed, and her mother-instinct made her realize what was going on in Jane's mind.

"We've all got to be comrades, and take what comes to us, and make life worth while in spite of the hard knocks," she went on softly. "And, Janey, you're one of the best of us at doing that when you make up your mind to it."

Jane's gaze had fallen from the photograph of her twin to a rapt contemplation of the front of the pretty dress, but she looked up as her mother

Jane Stuart, Twin

stopped speaking. There was a certain triumph in her eyes, which was strangely contradicted by a large tear which splashed down her cheek in spite of her.

"Mother," she began, flicking away the tear airily, and wondering if her smile looked as one-sided as it felt, "I think that if I take your tiniest scissors I can rip out these tucks, and then perhaps the dress will be long enough."

"I believe it will, too, darling." Mrs. Stuart's tone was so calmly responsive, so matter-of-fact, that her daughter's chin steadied itself at once. "And as it doesn't button too easily perhaps we can let it out. I have great hopes of your capacity."

"Well, I don't know about my capacity, but anyway I have some perfectly good white shoes. I'm sure of those because I slipped them on the other day." Jane had gone back to her every-day dress by this time and was hunting for the small scissors. "I'll take the dress into my room now, and after dinner I'm going to sit out on the piazza and rip. It's too lovely to stay indoors. Good-bye, mother."

"Good-bye, Janey. Snip the little stitches carefully, and don't cut the dress."

Almost out of the room Jane turned to gaze at mother and found her looking, too, with the smile

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that always spoke to her daughter's heart. With one bound she was back again, dropping dress and scissors in her impetuous haste.

"Please say, 'Good-bye, comrade,'" she begged, sniffing a little and not minding in the least this time whether her chin quivered or not. "I'm going to be one now truly. I was so pleased with myself because I hadn't fussed—much—and I never noticed that there hadn't really been anything to fuss about. Now, if you'd like to have me stay at home from the party and—and sweep the stairs—or anything else, I'll do it, because I haven't thought about education, or sickness, or anything, but myself."

Jane lifted her head with a truly heroic air. Sweeping the stairs was her pet abomination, as her mother knew. "I'll even sweep 'em and not let you know how I hate it," she added, feeling that this was the greatest sacrifice possible.

Mrs. Stuart laughed. "If you're bound to have a penance you might put peas in the white shoes the way some of the old pilgrims are said to have done, and walk to the party in them," she said whimsically.

"I should hate to insult those perfectly grand shoes that way. I've had plenty of white shoes before, but there's an air about these that makes them different from all the rest." Jane was gath-

Jane Stuart, Twin

ering up the white dress as she spoke, and she turned again toward the door.

“Good-bye, commander,” she said with a salute which she fondly believed to be truly military.

“Farewell, comrade,” answered her mother, giving as good an imitation as she could achieve. And then they both laughed, and Jane ran out of the room.

When she settled herself on the piazza after dinner David was already ensconced in a corner with a book.

“You can just be thankful you don’t have tucks in your clothes, Mr. Spinksy Stuart,” she said with an air of cheerful martyrdom. “If you did, you’d probably have to sit down with the scissors too.”

“What’s doing?” David left his chair and strolled over to where his sister was sitting. “Got to rip all those bits of stitches? Jiminy! Why don’t you put a—a—what do you call it?—an addition on the bottom?”

“This isn’t a house I’m ripping, Spinksy. Reading so much has affected your eyesight, I’m afraid.”

“Not a bit. I should get a piece of lace, or—or crochet-work, and sew it all up so that it pulls with a draw-string, and fasten it tight on the bottom of the dress, and—and there you are.”

“Certainly, there I am,” agreed Jane solemnly.

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“ And there you are, right in my light. It’s easy to see through you most of the time, Spinksy, but —— Oh, there comes Carol ! ”

“ The Lady Jane was tall and slim,
The Lady Jane was fair ;
And Sir David, her twin, was strong of limb,
And she was exceedingly fond of him,
And they were a loving pair, ”

sang Carol, suiting the words to the occasion. She came up the front walk, looking so gay and bright that for a moment Jane could hardly believe it possible that she could ever seem otherwise. “ Hello, Lady Jane—what are you so busy about ? ” she asked cheerfully, seating herself beside Jane and looking at the dress with interest.

“ I’ve grown out of my dress, and we’ve got to let these tucks down,” answered Jane, half wishing she didn’t have to explain to this girl, who probably didn’t know anything about such economies.

“ Do let me take those dinky little scissors and you get another pair.” Carol took the scissors without waiting for permission, and began deftly to cut the stitches. “ Now, listen,” she began, taking command of the situation with surprising enthusiasm. “ We’ll rip one tuck, and then you

Jane Stuart, Twin

try it on, and I'll see how many more we need to rip. And if the stitches show I'll cover the place with feather-stitching, and ——" Carol interrupted herself to laugh joyously. "You're looking at me as if you thought I'd gone mad," she went on, laughing again at Jane's amazed face. "Really, there's nothing I love so much as fussing over dresses. It's my specialty. Elise, mother's maid, says I could earn my living that way if I had to. I'm always doing something to my own clothes when I can get the chance, and I adore embroidery and any kind of fancy sewing."

"It's a perfectly glorious talent to have," sighed Jane, admiration in voice and face. "I can sew some, of course, but I'm scared when it comes to trying anything like this."

"Trust to me and get some scissors," said Carol dramatically. "It's a darling little dress, and we can fix it perfectly well."

Jane ran into the house to search for more small scissors, and David, who, at Carol's appearance, had gone back to his corner, looked from behind his book at the absorbed face bent over the ripping. It was quite unnecessary that Jane should have many friends, he was thinking, for this one seemed to provide variety enough. He was trying to imagine how she would look if she were cross and moody as Jane had seen her the other

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day, when, to his confusion, she glanced up suddenly and caught his gaze.

He retired precipitately behind his book, but her laugh brought him out again to face the situation.

"I suppose you think I'm a freak," she said, pausing in her work and thoughtfully swinging the little pair of scissors to and fro on one finger. "Well, perhaps I am, but I hate to have people find it out so soon." She bent her head over the dress again with a made-up sigh, which served its purpose of making David feel very uncomfortable.

"Why—why, I don't ——" he stammered, and then he blessed Jane with all his heart for coming out of the house just at that moment. The two girls fell into lively chatter at once, and as soon as he reasonably could, David slipped away, feeling that if he could find Rob Randall he should be in less trying companionship.

The dress having been tried on after the ripping of one tuck, it was decided that one more tuck would do.

"The pressing will bring it down a little more," said Carol, with a practical air. "And that will leave us a group of three tucks, which is quite correct. I can see perfectly, too, how we're going to let the dress out a little."

"You talk just like the real thing," marveled

Jane Stuart, Twin

Jane, as they began work again. "I'm lost in admiration, and I think you're perfectly wonderful."

"Wait till we get through, and then see if you think so," Carol murmured as she snipped away with the utmost care. "By the way, are you in any hurry for this? I expect to go away tomorrow."

"I want to wear it Saturday if I can," responded Jane, with a queer feeling of embarrassment. "I—I haven't had a chance to tell you yet that Serena Holt is going to have some girls at her house on Saturday, and I'm invited."

"Why, when ——?"

"They came to see me yesterday afternoon," interrupted Jane. "Serena and Peggy Curtis and Polly Reed." She was anxious to get the explanation over as soon as possible, and she wished with all her heart that she knew of some way to adjust the troubles of her friends.

"Did they—did they mention me?" Carol's head was bent low over her work, and the words came indistinctly.

"They said you used to be great friends with them, and now you aren't."

"It was really all my fault," avowed Carol, stopping the little scissors to look miserably at Jane. "I don't know what got into me last sum-

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mer to make me act so snippy. I had two girls visiting me, and I was perfectly crazy over them for a while, and they didn't want to know the girls here, and they tried to keep me away from them. Afterward, when I just couldn't bear those girls, and wanted to make up with Serena and the others, it was too late, of course."

She began her work again with sudden haste, and the last inch of tuck was finished before she spoke again.

"There, Lady Jane," she said, holding up the dress triumphantly, "we can get it ready for Saturday as well as not. I can put off going away until late that afternoon. I'd ten times rather come over here and sew with you, anyway."

"Oh, but you mustn't give up anything to work on my dress." Jane was aghast at such self-sacrifice. "Mother and I can ——"

"You'd better make the most of it when I'm so helpful as I am now. You never can tell about me. At least that's what every one says, so probably it's true. And it isn't every day you can get a born dressmaker for nothing."

"I should say not." The fervor of Jane's reply made the other girl smile. "It's perfectly lovely of you to do it for me, and oh, dear, I just wish you were going ——"

Jane Stuart, Twin

“Don’t,” said Carol sharply, dropping dress and scissors into Jane’s lap and running down the walk.

Jane called a good-bye and watched until she was quite out of sight; then turned to go into the house.

“She’s about four different kinds of a girl, isn’t she?” said David, suddenly confronting her in the doorway. “She keeps me guessing, I can tell you.”

When Jane sat down to dinner on Saturday she was filled with a happy excitement, and a strong sense of satisfaction. She was really pleased with herself, because, for once, everything was ready to put on, and there would be no scurrying around at the last moment to find articles which hid themselves with malicious persistency.

“I must be getting almost as orderly as Spinksy,” she said to herself, as a vision of her room rose before her mind. The pretty dress, comfortable now, and quite long enough, lay smoothly on the bed. Ribbons, a soft pale pink, nestled beside it. On the floor, near the foot of the bed, stood the white shoes.

Jane’s meditations were interrupted by an excited battle of words between Judy and Kenneth as to the merits of their respective pets. Rags, having apparently mistaken Fluff for a stranger

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that morning, and chased her up a tree, was very much in disgrace in Judy's eyes.

"It isn't a puppy's fault when he does things like that," said Jane, dashing gallantly into the conversation. "It's his instinct, and he doesn't know any better."

"P'raps you wouldn't say so if 'twas your cat," retorted Judy.

"Ken must train him to behave," David advised. "You can teach those puppies a great deal, and he's really a perfect terror."

"I do try." Kenneth's earnestness was almost pathetic. "But it's an awful job, and there are so many nice things to do here."

Miss Trot, bringing in a rice-pudding for dessert, caught a part of the conversation and couldn't abstain from joining therein.

"He's loose and chasin' round somewheres now," she said. "I saw him more'n fifteen minutes ago kitin' after a hen."

Jane laughed. "He's a wretch, but I love him. Oh, there's Carol. She said she'd be over right after dinner to see me get ready."

Carol took possession of Mrs. Stuart as they all rose from the table, and put both arms around her for an instant as though she, too, longed for a share in this mother. For a few moments all the children lingered in the dining-room, and Miss

Jane Stuart, Twin

Trot, clearing the table, hung around, also, and listened with a pleased smile to the gay chatter.

“Whose turn is it to help Susan with the dishes?” asked mother suddenly, but before any one could answer there was the sound of something thumping gently down the stairs, and a low growling, interrupted by an occasional sharp bark. David and Kenneth started at once, but they were too late to intercept Rags, who dashed through the hall and out of the front door dragging something white.

“My shoe!” gasped Jane, who had reached the hall just behind her brothers, and stood gazing with tragic eyes after the escaping puppy. The boys were in pursuit, and it was not long before Rags dropped his prize and crouched low, wagging his tail and waiting to be overtaken.

When they reached the house again, Kenneth carrying the culprit and David investigating the shoe, Jane was white with anger and disappointment.

“Let me see it, David,” she cried, almost snatching the shoe from his hand. Its whiteness was sadly dimmed, but worse than that the dog’s sharp teeth had gone through it in several places, and the toe was chewed beyond repair.

“It’s spoiled—it’s wholly spoiled.” Jane’s eyes were blazing as she lifted them from her inspection

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of the shoe. "That dog is a perfect pest, and something ought to be done about it. I should like to ——"

"It's a puppy's instinct to do things like that," interrupted Judy. "You said ——" she stopped with an abruptness that surprised them all. Judy was learning lessons in these days, also. "I'm awfully sorry. I wish you could wear mine," she ended softly.

Susan Trot, sympathetic to the point of despair, and twisting her apron as fiercely as though her own temper were in question, stood a little apart from the others. At sight of her the color rushed into Jane's cheeks like a flame, and she clenched her hands until it hurt, and swallowed resolutely.

"I—I think in the best families they're wearing black shoes now with their white dresses," she said at last with a little laugh that caught in her throat and sounded like something else. She saw her mother's hand go to her forehead in an involuntary salute which cheered her inexpressibly. Mother knew how much she cared for those white shoes.

"Come on, Carol," she went on almost cheerfully. "Let's go up-stairs and see whether he has devoured my dress and ribbons."

Miss Trot, retreating to the kitchen, sighed with intense relief. "Ain't she a real he-ro-ine?" she

Jane Stuart, Twin

said to Judy, quite unconscious that she, herself, had in any way contributed to Jane's victory.

Judy, dish-towel in hand, was silently revolving the situation. "I think that was perfectly splendid of Jane," she announced in a tone of conviction. "I will say it even if she is my sister."

CHAPTER X

SHOE-POLISH

UP-STAIRS Jane was surveying the shoes she must wear with an expression of unmitigated disgust. "They're big and thick and clumping," she said dolefully. "But it's these or stay at home, and I'm not going to lose the first party I've had a chance at."

"Good for you," encouraged Carol. "They'll look all right with a little shoe-polish on them. I'll take them down-stairs to Susan, shall I?"

"Get David to black 'em. There's a new bottle of polish, and he'll have to open it. I'll be doing my hair while you're gone."

Carol ran down-stairs and found David on the front porch talking with Rob Randall. "You're requested to polish these, kind sir, for your perfectly splendid sister," she said, handing the shoes to David. "She didn't say she was perfectly splendid," she hastened to add, "but I do. Wasn't she just dandy about those white shoes? I should have torn up everybody and everything."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," David contradicted coolly, quite as much to his own astonishment as

Jane Stuart, Twin

to hers. "You've got lots of good sense, I can see it in your eyes. Jane is all right, though, and I'll put an extra shine on her shoes to prove I think so." He was quite conscious that this commendation was weak compared to the pride he was feeling. It wouldn't do to say too much about one's twin sister, even though she was such a good sport, he was thinking as he started around the house.

Carol followed him, and Rob, lazily picking up the armful of books he had deposited on the piazza, went also. "Going to do it out here?" he inquired as they reached the side porch. "Carol and I will superintend the performance, won't we, Carol?"

David looked as if he could have spared so interested an audience, but he said nothing, and departed into the house in search of the new bottle of shoe-polish.

While he was gone Carol gave Rob an animated account of Rags' successful raid, and Jane's struggle to keep her temper. "She was the real thing, for those were perfectly ducky white shoes," she ended, lowering her voice suddenly at the sound of footsteps.

David came out on the side piazza with the bottle of polish in one hand, a corkscrew in the other. "I can't start this cork with my fingers," he said cheerfully, "but this will fetch her all right."

Shoe-Polish

He inserted the corkscrew with nice care into the very center of the cork and screwed it in, while his audience looked on with the critical attention which so often gets on the nerves of the principal performer.

"Doesn't he do that beautifully?" murmured Carol with a mischievous smile. "If there's anything I enjoy it's to watch a boy do things like this. They're so clever about it."

David, just preparing to draw with steady firmness on the cork, nearly dropped the bottle in his embarrassment.

"If you want to have Jane's shoes done this afternoon you'd better stop jollying me. I'm bashful," he warned.

"Never should have suspected it." Carol's eyes were dancing with delight. "I'll turn my back if you like."

"Never mind—it's coming now," but in spite of a long, strong pull the cork didn't move.

"Ginger! That's stuck in tight," said David perplexedly. "I hate to break a cork, but I guess I'll have to."

"Here, let me try it," and Rob got up from the edge of the piazza where he and Carol were sitting. "They always bring me all the olive bottles and pickle jars to open at home. I'm a cracker-jack at this sort of a trick."

Jane Stuart, Twin

“Conceited thing! If you do it I shall think it’s because David got it started. He’s just as strong as you are.”

“It isn’t strength alone, Miss Heath, it’s skill,” observed Rob, smiling at her blandly. “Now, notice, please, that this first time I’m not trying to draw it. I’m merely investigating to find out how tight it is. There, you see it’s still in the bottle, serenely happy in fulfilling its mission. Again observe, please,” Rob was tightening his grip on the handle of the corkscrew, “now it clings desperately, but in vain. ‘It starts, it moves, it ——’ Thunderation, I should think it did!”

Carol jumped and screamed and ran as the cork, once started, shot from the bottle, followed by a stream of shoe-polish.

“You needn’t run. It’s all on me,” said Rob, standing with his eyes shut while little rivulets of blacking trickled down his face. “If any kind-hearted person would take this bottle, and get me a wet cloth or something ——”

A window opened above the piazza, and Jane’s head appeared. “Are my shoes almost finished?” she asked with some impatience.

“No, but I am, and the bottle’s open,” responded Robert feebly. “I wish you were down here, Jane. You’ve got some sense. These two crazy things can only stand here and laugh.”

Shoe-Polish

Jane, still in her every-day dress, flew downstairs. She hadn't been able to see Rob from her window, but the helpless laughter of the other two drew her.

At first sight of the afflicted youth, irrepressible mirth seized her. Then she grew suddenly sober. "Oh, Rob, it didn't go into your eyes, did it?" she demanded in a tone of such unmistakable anxiety that the others stopped laughing directly. And then all at once she realized that for the first time she was seeing Rob without the protecting smoked glasses.

"David, get a basin of water—quick——" she commanded. "I'll get a cloth—and ask mother to come."

"Don't get excited, Jane. My eyes are all right," said Robert with a coolness that calmed her at once. "Only I don't dare open 'em with this stuff running down."

"My, but that feels good," he went on a moment later as David sopped his face with water. "Just get the worst of it off, Davy, and then I'll go home and get my mother to scrub me. She's had experience."

"It'll take scrubbing," said David, giving his chum a dry cloth on which to wipe his face. "I think by using lemon-juice and several different kinds of sand-soap you may get most of it off by next Christmas."

"Oh, get out! I don't believe it's so bad as

Jane Stuart, Twin

that. And I'm not going to please you by looking at myself in any mirror, either, until I get home. Jane, I'm sorry I can't polish your shoes for you, because you were such a dandy about coming to my rescue. Once in a while you do find a girl who really has some presence of mind." With which withering remark Rob picked up his books, which fortunately had escaped the deluge, and started for home and mother.

An hour later, when Jane, fresh as a rose in her white dress and pink ribbons, walked by the Randall house on her way to Serena's party, a clean and well-dressed youth strolled down the front walk and fell into step beside her.

"Where are you going? Will you please take me?" he said, quite as if he hadn't seen Jane in a month. "I really think you need some one to show you the way."

"Perhaps I do. Carol meant to come part way with me, but I was—ahem—I was delayed in getting ready, and she had to go home. And Davy just wouldn't come for fear I'd make him go all the way to the house, and he might possibly see a girl or two. It's positively harrowing to have that boy so bashful."

"I shall have to take him in hand," mused Rob. "I believe I'll go over and talk to him after I land you."

Shoe-Polish

"You make me feel like a fish with a horrid hook in it when you talk about 'landing me,'" said Jane plaintively. "You don't have to feel any responsibility about me. You may go back to Davy now if you want to. I know the way."

"Oh, I don't mind seeing that you get there all right. You've been very nice to me—tried to present me with a hen the moment you arrived, and ——"

"Robert Randall, do you want me to tell these girls how well you can take the cork out of a blacking-bottle, and how you fairly threw things at me the first time I was really introduced to you?" interrupted Jane in a panic. Then she stood still and looked at him appealingly. "You haven't been telling everybody about that dreadful hen, have you?"

"Not a soul, upon my word," chuckled Rob, delighted at the impression he had made. "And what's more I won't if you don't want me to."

"I should say I don't. At least not until I get much better acquainted."

"All right, then. And if you get stumped for conversation—girls find it so hard to talk—you may tell the nicest story you can about me and the shoe-polish," conceded Rob with great magnanimity.

"What generosity!" sighed Jane. They were

Jane Stuart, Twin

crossing the street for the last time, and Serena's house was in sight. As they reached the sidewalk Jane instinctively looked down at her shoes. "Talk about shoe-polish!" she said with a tragic air; "you needn't think I shall try to converse about anything connected with shoes. Look at those!"

She was stamping her foot as she spoke in a vain attempt to get rid of the white dust which had settled thickly.

"Hold on there, I'll fix 'em," and before she could prevent it, Rob was lightly flicking off the dust with his handkerchief. "There you are as good as new," he said triumphantly. "Now run along in and don't be shy. This is a nice crowd of girls you're going to meet this afternoon. I can speak for all of them—except, perhaps, one. Oh, I remember now, she's away, and you won't see her."

"Who is she?" begged Jane, full of curiosity over this last remark, but Rob only lifted his hat with a smile and walked off.

"I'm going to look up David," he called back. "Perhaps I'll be over to see Ned Holt later on."

Jane walked up to the front door and there found one of the massive knockers which had captured her fancy on the day of her arrival. To her disappointment she had no chance to use it,

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however, for the door flew open, and Serena appeared.

“My dear, we’ve been waiting and watching for you,” she said greeting her guest with outstretched hands. “Let me put your hat here. Your hair looks all right, but here’s a mirror if you want to see. Now come in. The girls are just crazy to know you.”

Inside the long living-room Jane was warmly welcomed by Polly and Peggy, who seemed like old friends.

“Awfully glad to see you again,” said Polly. “I’d like to stay and talk with you, but Serena says I’ll have to go home if I gabble the way I did when we called on you, so I’m scared.”

Peggy moved away also after the first greeting. “We’ve got to be polite and let the other girls have a chance,” she murmured, “but I hate to do it.”

“I was just crazy to introduce them to you,” sighed Polly. “No one could set off their fine points so well as I can, but Serena wouldn’t let me.”

“Run along,” said Serena good-naturedly. “Jane, this is Esther Strong, who writes poems about us all, and this is Marian Chester, who thinks we’re all the nicest ever, and tells us so a dozen times a week.”

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Jane smiled at a tall, slender girl, pale and a little stooped, who blinked at her kindly with near-sighted eyes. Then her hand was seized by a plump, auburn-haired little girl who was blushing and giggling over Serena's introduction of her.

"They say I jolly them," she gurgled in a sweet, small voice, "but I really do think they're the nicest ever, and I'm sure you will when you know them."

"That's enough, child, here's some one else," and Serena brought along a tall girl with rosy cheeks and big, soft brown eyes which looked with warm friendliness into Jane's. "This is Molly Oliver, commonly called 'Mollyolly,'" the youthful hostess said gravely, "and, words failing me, I'm going to leave you to find out all about her yourself."

Mollyolly grasped Jane's hand and pumped it in boyish fashion, smiling broadly meanwhile and showing the whitest of teeth.

"You'd think I was a wonder, wouldn't you?" she said in a soft, rather deep voice, which fascinated her new friend at once. "Well, I'm not, so don't be disappointed."

"Now don't tell anything about yourself, because that's my part, and it's my first turn," announced Marian Chester, coming back again. At the same moment Serena presented Jane with a card

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which was headed "Conversation Party," and which proceeded to set forth that ten minute conversations would be held with the guest of honor by each of the girls whom she had not previously met. Said guest to be taken into the curtained alcove and talked with privately according to program.

"I'm first," repeated Marian Chester joyously. "My topic is 'The Girls.' Come on, Jane.

"You see we thought," she went on a moment later when they were comfortably ensconced on the window-seat in the alcove, "that if you could only hear a lot about us right away you'd feel more at home, and as if you'd known us all your life."

Jane nodded in pleased agreement, but had no chance to say anything because Marian took up the word immediately.

"I don't know where to begin," she confessed. "Unless I start with the 'Triad,' which is what we call Serena and Polly and Peggy. They're so united, without being the least bit alike, and each one of them is just as nice as each other. That doesn't sound quite right, but I'm sure you know what I mean. They are all fourteen, and their birthdays come in the same month, and they've solemnly vowed to be friends forever and ever."

Marian paused for a second, but continued before Jane could say anything.

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"Esther is a perfect grind, but she's an old darling all the same. And so clever! My dear, you have no idea what lovely things she writes. Any magazine ought to be proud to publish her stories. There was one about—oh, I mustn't stop to tell you that, or I shall never get through.

"Serena has a brother Ned," she went on breathlessly, "two years older than she is. Great chum of Rob Randall. Rob's nice-looking, isn't he?"

For an instant all Jane could think of was Rob, with his face screwed up, his eyes tightly shut, and shoe-polish adorning his countenance, and she smiled broadly.

"You see I've just seen him to-day for the first time without those dark glasses," she hesitated. "I really didn't have much time to decide about——"

"And, of course, you couldn't be expected to like red hair," sighed Marian, making her joyous face express as much melancholy as it possibly could. Then, before Jane could protest, she was chattering again as fast as ever.

"It doesn't make much difference about looks after all, and I don't believe I've got more than three minutes left. Only I'm sorry, though, that you don't like red hair, and I shall have to help Rob bear up under the disappointment. Perhaps

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you'll like Ned's other chum, Jack Dexter, better than you do Rob. He's ——"

"I thought your subject was 'girls,'" interrupted Jane mischievously, and then they both laughed until Serena called, "You've had eight minutes, Marian. Hurry up!"

"What can I say in two minutes?" Marian was in a panic. "Oh, how could I forget Mollyolly? She's our athletic girl, and she's a perfect joy. She's almost sixteen, but she chums with us just the same, and we all adore her. Somehow—I can't exactly explain why—there's something about her that"—for the first time Marian's fluency deserted her—"oh, she's just right, and you'll see what I mean when you know her."

"Time's up," called Serena. "Wasn't it clever of us to give Marian that subject? Is there anything nice you don't know about us now, Jane?" she asked, as Marian left the alcove, and Molly Oliver took her place.

"Lots," answered Jane, and added solemnly, "I didn't have a chance to ask a single question." A remark which the other girls, including the unrepentant Marian, received with a shout of laughter.

Molly's subject was athletics, and during the first five minutes Jane found herself telling all she knew, and had ever accomplished in that branch.

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The other girl asked a few questions, but it was more the responsive interest of her eyes which drew forth the information she wanted.

"You'll do," she said, at last, nodding her head wisely. "We shall need you for basket-ball and tennis. I'm glad you're going to be here next winter, because you can tell us how they play the games somewhere else. We're trying to give our school a high standard, and it won't do for us to think we're the only ones."

Then, for the second five minutes, Jane heard about the snow-shoe club, and skating parties; about games in the open as well as school athletics, until she began to feel that Belhaven offered delightful possibilities of which she had not dreamed.

Serena called the time promptly, and Molly departed with another boyish hand-shake. "I'm going to count on you to help us out a lot next winter," she said heartily, and Jane, without knowing why, felt that some signal honor had been conferred upon her.

"I'm all ready for my next guest," she said gaily, poking her head out between the curtains. As she did so she noticed for the first time that something she had taken for a window was really a door, opening on a side piazza, and that some of the girls were busy setting a table out there.

"I'm coming," answered Esther, who seemed to

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have forgotten for the moment that anything devolved upon her, and rose in embarrassed haste to cross the room.

Before she reached the alcove, however, they all heard the sudden opening of the front door, and a second later another girl appeared in the doorway of the living-room.

"Well, I like this, Serena Holt," she said with a great pretense of being aggrieved, and hurrying on before any one else could get in a word. "You shouldn't have a party when your nearest neighbor is away.—Hullo, girls. Polly, I believe you're fatter than ever; and, Peggy, didn't I tell you not to wear that color again on your hair? I came right over, Serena, because, of course, I knew you would have invited me if I'd been at home."

"Of course," assented Serena, without any enthusiasm. "Jane, this is Rita Mayo."

"I'm awfully glad to meet you," said the newcomer as Jane stepped out of the alcove. "I should have called on you, but I've been away. But why do they keep you shut up in a corner by yourself?"

Jane hastened to explain, and added, "I'm just going to talk about 'school' with Esther."

"Fiddlesticks. You'd a great deal better talk to me. Come on, let me be your partner this time. Esther won't mind, will you, Essie?" and

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before any one could interfere she had put her arm around Jane's waist, and hurried her back to the alcove. There was a chorus of protest from the other girls, to which Rita paid not the slightest attention. Jane, amused and rather interested by this aggressive stranger, allowed things to take their course because she didn't know what else to do.

"Mercy! You poor child," said Rita, looking at the card which Jane carried. "I must say their idea of entertainment isn't mine. My dear, you should be grateful to me, for I've saved you from being bored to extinction. Now tell me all about yourself and your family and how you happened to come here. That's a perfectly sweet little dress. Where did you have it made?"

Jane always felt herself stiffening when people were inquisitive, but this time her defenses crumpled into nothingness before Rita's penetrating inquiries. She hardly knew what she was telling, and she felt all the more doubtful when the other girl said with an air of triumph:

"I'm positive we're going to be great chums. You look as though you know how to have fun, and I'm sure I do." She hesitated for an instant, and gazed at Jane sharply with her pale-blue eyes.

"I'm going to tell you one thing, though. You can't be friends with me and the other Belhaven

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girls if you're going to be intimate with Carol Heath. There, I told the girls I should say that, and I have."

Jane sprang from the window-seat and looked at Rita with flashing eyes. "I don't see that you or the others have any right to tell me what friends I shall have," she began, and then the immediate consciousness that probably the other girls had nothing to do with this made her stop and try to control her anger.

"Now, don't get huffy," implored Rita, raising her voice more than she realized. "Of course you couldn't expect the Triad to like Carol, and the rest of us don't like her because she's treated them so meanly. I can't bear her, she's such a snob, and ——"

Jane's hand was on the curtain before Rita could go any farther, and she stepped out into the room, to be met by Serena and Molly Oliver, both hastening to her rescue.

"Rita, how could you?" began Serena.

"Oh, I don't believe you feel the way she thinks you do," interrupted Jane, taking instant comfort from Serena's distressed face, and Molly's indignant eyes. "And even if you do I just can't give up Carol."

"No one wants you to," protested Molly and Serena in the same breath. Then they both

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started to say something and, having begun, each waited for the other, only to break into speech once more at exactly the same moment, and stop again.

"Now—one—two—three, sing it, girls, if you can't talk," cried the incorrigible Polly, making them all laugh, and thereby clearing the atmosphere a little. Then, quite serious now she turned to the trouble-maker. "Rita, you needn't drag me into any remarks you make about Carol Heath. I never have stopped liking her, and I don't believe I ever shall."

"Oh, I wish she could hear that," sighed Jane, instinctively drawing nearer to the valiant Polly. "Of course I don't blame you at all for feeling the way you do, and Carol doesn't either. She said it was all her fault, and she's dreadfully sorry."

"Did she really say that?" demanded Peggy, for whom confession of wrong-doing was difficult. "I'm beginning to feel quite fond of her again."

"Well, anyway, she's been very nice to me, and she was my first friend here, and I couldn't possibly give her up even though—even though I do like you all so much." Jane's frank, smiling eyes traveled from one to another, but in some way managed to avoid the seventh girl, the late-comer.

"Well, I was only standing up for the Triad," remarked Rita with a shrug. "If they want to

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kow-tow to her I've nothing more to say. Of course, it's easier forgiving some one who has automobiles, and boxes of candy, and ——"

"See here, Rita," said Molly Oliver with sudden sternness, "we're all aware that you like to say things to shock people, but Jane Stuart doesn't know you yet, and there's no need of making her think you're more disagreeable than you really are. I'm sure I'm very sorry that you didn't miss the train that brought you home this afternoon."

"Oh, well, I like to see you all get agitated over my speeches." To Jane's surprise Rita didn't seem at all angry at Molly's plain speaking.

"Come now and have something to eat," called Serena, who was on the piazza.

Out-of-doors, with the sweet spring air blowing in her face, Jane felt her spirits rise. It seemed so like old times to sit around with girls, chattering as only girls can chatter, and consuming delicious sandwiches and cake, salted nuts and candy. It was quite like Sterling, she told herself, especially so when Ned Holt and Jack Dexter, Rob Randall and David came to perch on the piazza railing and help eat all that was left.

They told jokes and stories, and finally, being provided with pencil and paper, struggled to finish out limericks, the first line of which was

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given to them. Most of them were pretty poor, some really funny, but Rob, who was the last to read, surprised them all.

"I didn't like that first line you gave me, so mine is wholly original," he remarked casually. "And I want you to understand that I know more about grammar and spelling than the last word of my second line would indicate. We poets have to take some liberties, don't we, Esther?"

Esther nodded with a pleased seriousness, which made Rob chuckle. Then he drew down his face soberly and began :

"There was a young girl who refused
To give up the friend she had chused.
With a flash of her eye,
And a hurt little cry,
She showed that she felt much abused."

"Why, how did you know?" demanded Jane, jumping up suddenly and looking at him with startled eyes.

"Know what?" Rob's manner was all innocence.

"They probably were hanging around on the piazza before we appeared," said Rita. "I wonder that there was anything left for us."

"Not guilty," said Ned. A statement which was instantly confirmed by the others.

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"Don't please them by asking any more questions," said Mollyolly. "I must go, girls. Jane, I'm coming over to see you right away. I'm so glad you've come to Belhaven to live."

"I'm awfully sorry every minute wasn't pleasant," whispered Serena, when she was saying good-bye. "Come again soon, and remember that you belong partly to us."

Jane, walking home with David and Rob, was her usual gay, talkative self. Just as they were leaving Rob at his house she turned upon him suddenly.

"How did you know what I—what you wrote in that foolish note?" she demanded.

"Please, ma'am, it was very simple. I was in the front hall waiting for Ned. But what made you say the thing I wrote about?"

"Oh! You don't know that. Very well, I can be mysterious, too. Good-night." And Jane marched off with her head held high, leaving Rob to smile at his own thoughts.

CHAPTER XI

EAVESDROPPERS

"JANE, you're going to have a horrid time between us all, aren't you?" said Carol, staring gloomily at her friend who was seated, sketch-book in lap, on the side piazza. Carol had been away since the day of the party, and now, three days later, had come over to hear about it.

"Oh, I don't know," Jane answered absently. She was holding up her pencil to get the length of a branch, and squinting through half-shut eyes at the feathery foliage. She had been meaning to have a try at this particular tree, which, in its spring loveliness, was deriding all her attempts to put it on paper.

"Well, of course, you will," Carol persisted. "I shall never be willing to give you up to Polly and Serena and Peggy, and they certainly won't let you escape them. We shall always be dodging each other."

"The four other girls have been to see me since Serena had us at her house." Jane had dropped her pencil and was counting them on her fingers. "And some more are coming."

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"I see my finish." Carol's voice and face were mournful. "I never shall have one minute of you unless I fairly snatch it away from some one else. You had a fine time at Serena's party, and you're going to like those girls—you know you are."

"Well, I can't help it if I am," protested Jane, picking up the pencil, and trying once more to make her sketch look as much like a tree as it did like almost anything else. She had not told Carol about her share in Serena's party, and she was wondering how she should make her understand that some of the girls, at least, weren't unfriendly, and would probably be willing to make up.

"I like girls," she went on, "and I want to know a lot of them and have them like me. It makes a lot of difference to me, because I shall be here in the winter, and you won't."

"Well, I wish I hadn't been such a stupid goose. It was worse than being a goose—I was downright horrid to those girls, and I deserve to have them snub me."

"Did you ever tell ——" Jane began impulsively, but Carol, who was sitting near the corner, laid a finger on her lips and peered around cautiously to see who had come up on the front piazza. It was David and Rob Randall, and the first words the latter spoke made Carol flush

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rosily, and hold up an imploring hand to keep Jane silent.

"It's a mean shame Carol Heath isn't chummy with the other girls," Rob said as though continuing a conversation. "It's so bad if you want to get them all together for a good time."

Jane, who had been trained to a strict code of honor, felt that she ought to speak or cough, but Carol's insistent eyes held her.

"Whose fault is it?" asked David.

"Carol's, I suppose. And I dare say she's as ready to be friends again as the girls are to have her. Probably it will go on like this, because they won't any of them have spunk enough to talk right out. Just like girls. It makes me cross, because I want to have a party some time, and mother won't let me leave out any of them."

"Crickey! I hope they stay mad," said David apprehensively. "One reason I've liked this town so far is because I haven't been invited to any parties. I don't know what to say to girls."

"Tut, tut, sonny, you must learn." Rob's manner was so superior that the two silent listeners around the corner stuffed handkerchiefs in their mouths in helpless mirth. "It's good for you to mingle in society and learn to do the polite act. See what a model I am."

"Oh, come off," protested David. "I bet you

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don't like it any better than I do. Come on up into my room, and look at those stamps I was telling you about."

Carol was silent until they were quite out of hearing, then she said in a repressed voice, "So Mr. Rob Randall thinks girls haven't spunk enough to talk right out! And he wants to give a party and can't! And I'm interfering with David's social progress!"

By this time Jane was giggling uncontrollably at Carol's funny manner. "You know what they say about listeners," she gasped. "You didn't need to hear all that."

"I suppose it was mean to listen," Carol agreed, "but I only meant to let them say something, and then I was going to jump out at them. I didn't know the first thing they said would be about me.

"I'd like to know what made him say that I was probably as anxious to make up as the other girls are," she went on after a moment's silence. "Do you believe they ——"

"I certainly do." Jane's manner was convincing in the extreme. "I was just going to tell you so when the boys came."

Carol sat very still for a moment. Then she jumped up, her small face brilliant with excitement. "Lady Jane I'm going on a peace mission. Want to come?"

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"Yes, but I can't. I promised mother I'd stay about the house until she gets back."

"Perhaps it's just as well. It may not come out right. You'll hear later," and Carol whisked around the corner of the piazza in excited haste. A second later she was back again, and talking in the quick, breathless way which Jane had learned to associate with her friend's most intimate confidences.

"I don't know what made me think of it—unless it was because you mentioned your mother—but, Jane, I've been wanting to tell you that we're getting along better—I mean my mother and I. It was mostly my fault after all," she ended soberly.

"That's perfectly fine," Jane responded warmly. "I'm awfully glad. Some stepmothers are so nice they make you forget they're not own mothers. Perhaps yours will."

"Stepmothers!" repeated Carol wonderingly. "Why, she isn't my stepmother. I thought I told you that I'm—that I'm adopted."

Jane made herself sit perfectly still and speak calmly. Nevertheless, her voice sounded absurdly hopeful even to her own ears when she said, "Do you mean to say you're an orphan, Carol Heath?"

"Yes, I'm an orphan," answered Carol quite

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simply, and then, because for the moment she was seeing herself in the sorrowful light which that sad word radiates, her lip curled piteously and she turned her face away from her friend.

"Carol, don't you know ——" began Jane irrepressibly, but Carol faced her again just then, and with pleading eyes said as she had said before:

"Please don't talk about it to me, and promise again that you won't tell any one, Jane."

"Why, of course, I'll promise, though my first one is just as good as ever," agreed Jane disappointedly, and then before she could say another word Carol had vanished around the corner again.

"I don't see why she makes such a mystery of it," Jane said perplexedly when the last sound of rapid footsteps had died away. Then with a note of sternness in her voice, she added, "Now, Jane Stuart, don't be a nonsensical idiot. You know it isn't a bit likely. Try to think of something else."

She fixed her eyes on the far distance and tried to picture Carol going on her mission of peace. "I believe that's going to be all right," she murmured, "but I'd as soon not be with her." At last her gaze fell on the sketch she had been attempting, and then rose to the tree, quivering with life in every leaf. With a quick motion she tore the page from the book and crumpled it fiercely.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"It might just as well be a—a telegraph pole with curl papers hanging on it," she said despairingly. "I can never be an artist."

Suddenly she remembered how kindly and wisely that nice Mr. Stevens whom they had met on the train had talked to her about her wish to be an artist. Anything worth while must be worked for with patience and courage and—and—what was the other thing he had said?—oh, yes, with persistent desire. Jane had written that down in a little note-book which she used at long intervals, and which she had started afresh when she left Sterling. With the thought of this, courage rose again. "Some day, you green, lovely thing, I'll put you or one like you in my sketch-book, see if I don't," she said with determination written on her face.

"I wish to goodness I could have some drawing-lessons," she remarked to herself with a sigh as she got up from her chair. "But I know enough not to ask for them now."

She went to her room, still sternly suppressing her unruly imagination, and searched in her rather disorderly desk for the little note-book. Not finding it easily she set herself to the task of making the desk tidy. "I ought not to keep such a lot of rubbish in poor little Great-aunt Jane's desk," she thought reproachfully.

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When she first came she had hoped to find something that might have belonged to the youthful aunt for whom she was named, but the desk was empty. A portrait of its former owner, painted the year before she died, hung above it, and Jane liked to fancy that the half smile lingering about the girlish mouth was meant for her.

"There, little Aunt Jane, your desk is as neat as a pin," she said at last, finishing her work just as the hall clock struck three. "Now I'll get a duster and make the outside match the inside."

At the back of the desk something moved under Jane's fingers, and she dropped the duster with a cry of surprise. "It is —— I believe it really is a secret drawer," she cried rapturously. "And I thought when I first came that I pressed every inch of this desk.

"For once something is happening in a real story-booky way," she exulted, pulling out the long narrow drawer very slowly so that she might gloat over every inch. For the time being everything else was forgotten.

At first nothing greeted her intent gaze and she was in despair. Then an edge of paper came to light, and with one quick pull she disclosed a small, coverless book, made up of closely written sheets tied together with ribbon. On the yellowish outside leaf in a clear, delicate script was written,

Jane Stuart, Twin

“Diary of Jane Archer—begun on her fourteenth birthday.”

Jane Stuart, grandniece, opened it as soon as it was fairly in her hands. Then, to her own surprise, she shut it again, and looked gravely at the portrait. “Do you mind?” she asked aloud. “You know I’m your namesake.”

For an instant she half expected the pictured lips to open in answer to her question. A little feeling of embarrassment stole over her, and she laughed softly at her own foolishness. “If mother was here I’d ask her, but she isn’t, and I just know it’s all right,” she assured herself.

During the next hour, nestled in the capacious depths of the chintz-covered chair, Jane Stuart was lost to the world. At first this little story of another Jane, written with prim simplicity, made her smile with its descriptions of girlish good times, and its record of high resolves. Later on, the face bent over the book grew sober, and there were moments when she could hardly read the fine handwriting, because her eyes were full of tears, and there was an uncomfortable lump in her throat.

“Oh, dear, oh, dear,” she said with an irrepressible sob, putting her head down on the arm of the chair when she had finished the last page, and bedewing the gay roses with sympathetic tears.

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"She was so sweet and brave. She knew she'd got to die, but she never even let them think she knew."

Jane wiped her eyes, and turned the pages of the little book again with a very gentle hand. "How she and Aunt Caroline must have loved each other," she reflected. "She's always 'making a pleasant surprise for Sister Caroline,' or else one is being made for her. Poor Aunt Caroline has had to lose a great many people she was fond of."

And with that thought Jane's romantic imagination was off again, and she was once more wishing with all her heart that it might fall to her to do the thing which would bring most happiness to Aunt Caroline. She shut her eyes and, giving free rein to her fancy, tried to think how her orphan cousin would look. She would be a little older than herself, and probably her eyes and hair would be dark because she had an Italian mother, and —

"Oh, no one could fit that better than Carol," she said, with a sudden gasp of surprise. "Look at her complexion and hair and eyes. And Mr. Chope said the Heaths came from the Pacific Coast."

She got up from the encompassing chair, and shook herself impatiently, as if by so doing she could get rid of these wild ideas. "I wish I could stop being so foolish. It just couldn't be true,"

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she said, and then the possibility of it came back to her with convincing force, and she began stubbornly to tell herself all the arguments which might help out her theory. She saw Carol in the attic looking exactly like the pictures of Italian girls Jane had seen, and singing as if the foreign language belonged to her. Even that first day she had said she loved Italy, and could speak the language easily.

A familiar step in the hall made Jane start eagerly toward the door of her room. She would tell mother all about it, and see if she thought there was the slightest possibility that this girl could be her long-lost cousin.

Half-way there she turned back abruptly, remembering that she had promised Carol she wouldn't tell any one.

"This is a pretty pickle," she murmured perplexedly. "I can't consult mother nor Spinksy, and I don't want to say anything to Carol about it, because it's probably perfectly ridiculous. Spinksy would be sure to laugh at me. I'm going to forget it, and then if it pops up again I can tell better whether it's any good as an idea."

In spite of her wise resolves, however, she washed her face and hands and retied her hair to the accompaniment of a letter which she was composing; a letter to Aunt Caroline which should express her

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own gratitude, and delicately hint of mystery, and of future happiness for the recipient.

"I'm a perfect silly," she murmured, as she finished tying her hair before the mirror. For some reason the sight of her own face, and of the green ribbons, so becoming to her blonde locks, brought her back to every-day ideas, and tempered the active imagination which so often threatened to run away with her.

She stopped in her mother's room on her way down-stairs to tell her about the diary. "I really believe I'm going to like Aunt Caroline very much," she said, wondering what mother would think if she should know the fanciful flight in which her daughter had been indulging.

"I'm quite sure you will. She is a perfectly delightful companion when she feels like it. And often so good and helpful and generous that one can hardly be grateful enough."

"Why do I always feel that there is something about her I shan't like?" queried Jane perplexedly. "You say such nice things about her, and yet ——"

"It's because I don't feel sure just which side of Aunt Caroline's nature you may see," confessed Mrs. Stuart. "She's a very delightful, capricious, changeable little lady who will probably like you so much that you can't fail to return it."

"Well, I wish she'd come soon and begin liking

Jane Stuart, Twin

me," said Jane with a little laugh. "I'm really awfully curious about her since we've lived in her house."

"Carol Heath reminds me of her in looks and ways," Mrs. Stuart remarked with an unexpectedness that made her daughter jump.

"Does she?" Jane started for the door suddenly. She was so used to confiding in her mother that she was afraid to stay another minute for fear she should tell just what she had been thinking about. "I believe I'll go down-stairs now, mumsy," she called back from the hall.

When she reached the front piazza Rob and David were having a last, amiable wrangle over a stamp.

"Hello, Mrs. Janes, where have you been this afternoon?" David looked with approving eyes at his twin. Here was certainly one girl whom he enjoyed and was not afraid of.

"In my room most of the time," answered Jane. She was staring down the street and wondering absently whose big touring-car was heading straight for their house.

"Why, boys, it's Carol," she said excitedly, "and Polly and Serena." She ran down the walk in response to a peremptory signal from Carol, whose flushed face with its sparkling eyes was thrust out of the automobile to meet her as she approached.

Eavesdroppers

"Jane, they've all been perfectly sweet and dear and everything that's nice and lovely," she said softly, turning to bestow a radiant smile on the two other girls. "I only needed to tell them how sorry I am. And you're not to show the slightest surprise, and we're not going to hint that it hasn't been this way all the time. Poor Peggy couldn't come because she's taking care of her small brother."

"We've been all around the town to show ourselves," said Serena happily. "And now we're going to drive over to the beach before supper, and we want you and the boys to go, too."

"I'll ask mother," and Jane sped into the house, not stopping even to speak to the boys.

When she returned they were standing by the car, and Carol was issuing directions as to where they should sit.

"Robert, you go with the chauffeur, please, and David may come in with us. He's had two sisters, and he won't mind being with so many girls, will you, David?"

David smiled feebly in response to Carol's question and did exactly as he was told. At that moment he would have given anything he owned to be allowed to sit with the chauffeur, and watch him manage the machine, and ask all the questions he liked.

Jane, smiling slyly at her twin's discomfort, was

Jane Stuart, Twin

thinking how cleverly Carol had managed it all. Suddenly she sat up very straight and stared at her friend, and then turned her head away, hoping that no one had seen her. It was like Aunt Caroline, this wanting to manage people. A swift memory flashed through her mind of the way Carol had taken matters into her own hands in regard to the letting-down of the white dress. For an instant Jane exulted in her secret. Then she assured herself firmly that it was the most impossible thing in the world, and must be put out of her mind.

The gay chatter going on about her made her realize anew how much she had missed the good times with girls and boys, and she joined in the fun with her characteristic enthusiasm. Even David lost some of his shyness under Carol's teasing, and became quite friendly with Serena, who knew a great deal about stamps.

The tide was low when they reached the beach, and the great car swept them along over the glistening sand with tireless energy. Jane talked and laughed and sang with the others, but underneath it she was conscious of a deep joy in the beauty of it all. She loved the slow waves curling in, the little forgotten pools where the afternoon sunlight lingered, the wonderful rocks which rose like a rampart.

Eavesdroppers

After the beach they went back to the town and left Serena and Polly. Then it was only another five minutes before Jane and David were at their door, and Rob jumped out with them.

"We've had a fine time at your party," said David, as the machine wheeled in the direction of Carol's house and started off. Then he turned to the others with a bewildered expression in his eyes. "I thought you thought—I mean I was sure you did think ——" he stopped helplessly.

"Try it again, Spinksy, and say it slowly," cried Jane in mock alarm.

"I did think so," answered Rob in his most subdued manner. "I'm as much flabbergasted as you are. I bet Jane knows all about it," he went on, turning upon her quickly. "Tell us this minute how it happened that they made up."

"Why, girls have nice straightforward ways of doing such things, you know," answered Jane, trying her best to look very serious. "When Carol realized she was wholly in the wrong she had spunk enough to speak right out and tell them she was sorry. And girls are so generous, and so—so square that it's their nature to forgive their friends when they are truly sorry."

The two boys looked at each other speechlessly for an instant. Then Rob with a sudden spring

Jane Stuart, Twin

barred the progress of Jane, who was trying to escape into the house.

"Where were you this afternoon about—about two hours before Carol came for us?" he demanded peremptorily.

"Say, 'please,'" murmured Jane. She was trying to gain time.

"Well, 'please,' then."

"Don't glower at me so. You frighten me. Let me see. It was five when I went in to ask mother if it was all right for us to go. I noticed the clock in her room. And two hours before that was three o'clock, and I was dusting the desk in my room. There, you can't ask anything plainer than that."

"But before ——"

Jane slipped by him with a triumphant laugh. "I'm not going to answer any more questions," she called back defiantly. Half-way up the stairs she turned, and clasped her hands entreatingly. "Please, Rob, please don't give up your plans for making David like society. You'll find Carol and the other girls so helpful about it." Then she fled with the sound of the boys' laughter in her ears.

CHAPTER XII

A DOUBLE BIRTHDAY

JANE'S clearest impression of the next four weeks was of lessons and written tests which carried the year around to mid-June with its blue skies and blossoms. It was the day before the twins' birthday that the final tests, written in answer to papers sent on from Sterling, were securely enclosed in a long envelope and left with great ceremony by the entire Stuart family in the Belhaven post-office.

It had been agreed by the twins several weeks before this that as a point of honor no mention should be made of their birthday, on mother's account.

"Of course, she'll remember," David had said, "but if we don't go around hinting, as we usually do, about what we'd like to have, she can give us each some little thing and that'll end it. And the others won't think anything about it."

Jane having instantly admitted the force of this argument fell immediately upon trying times. It seemed to her that never had she seen so many things she admired, inexpensive treasures, too, which in the old days might easily have been hers.

Jane Stuart, Twin

Serena's letter-paper, Carol's coin-purse, Polly Reed's newest collar, cuff-links worn by Peggy! All, in the light of an approaching anniversary, so attractive and desirable. She confessed to David that she should be glad when the birthday was over.

It seemed to her that her mind was a sort of battle-ground for distracting thoughts, for when it wasn't lessons or birthdays, it was the quest of a cousin which occupied her. Try as she would she could not wholly shake off the idea that Carol might be Aunt Caroline's grandchild. She made frequent pictures in her own mind of the touching scene when she should bring them together. She could see them weeping glad tears in their perfect joy, while she modestly slipped out of sight. As up to this time, however, she had not been able to think of any satisfactory way in which to bring about this happy ending, Jane could not feel that any real progress had been made.

She might, perhaps, have spoken to Carol about it, but as that young person made no further reference to her troubles, and, now that she was friends with the girls again, seemed the gayest of the gay, Jane felt a certain delicacy about bringing up the subject.

The afternoon before their birthday she and David were sitting on the piazza after supper

A Double Birthday

watching Judy and Kenneth who were having a romp with Rags. Both children had started in mad pursuit of the dog, for he had delightedly located an unsuspecting cat and was bent on having fun with her.

"Spinksy, can you believe that we're really going to be fourteen to-morrow?" she demanded. "It makes me feel a great deal older."

"I don't notice any difference—yet." David was smiling broadly at the sight of the disappointed Rags, thwarted in his mischief by Kenneth, and made to sit and watch while the cat, with fine indifference, ambled into safety.

"Of course, it won't be much like our other birthdays," Jane went on with a little sigh, "but ——"

"Anyway, Mrs. Janes," her twin had turned to her now, and was putting his whole attention on the subject, "we'll have something to make us remember this birthday if we have to plan it ourselves. I don't know just what it'll be, but mark my words, there'll be something."

The last words were said with energy, but almost under his breath, for mother was just coming out on the piazza. Jane nodded a doubtful assent, but somehow she felt happier. Other girls might have more presents, she was thinking, but no one owned a twin brother like David.

Jane Stuart, Twin

The next morning Jane was late for breakfast, and, because it was the habit of years that the twins should appear at the table at the same moment on their birthday, David paced the hall impatiently and waited for her.

"For goodness' sake," he began, as she stepped out from her room. "I'm hungrier than ——" and then he stopped with his mouth open to stare wildly at his sister, and clutch the balusters for support, and groan softly.

"Stop acting so, you ridiculous boy," said Jane holding her head very stiff, and dimpling with laughter in spite of her most determined efforts. Then she revolved slowly before his worried eyes. "Don't you like it?" she demanded anxiously.

"Do I like it?" he repeated. "Do I like you with a wad of hair up on your head? Well, I should say not. Don't do it, Mrs. Janes, please. You've taken away my appetite."

"Boys haven't any taste about such things anyway. Come on down to breakfast." As she led the way, Jane patted the golden mass on top of her head solicitously, and poked in a pin here and there. She felt at least a mile tall, and she was positive there were fifty hairpins, most of them sticking into her at this moment.

David followed her resignedly. He had not been a twin for fourteen years without learning that

A Double Birthday

there are times when one might as well give up first as last.

"I told you there would be something to make us remember this birthday," he said in a low voice as they reached the foot of the stairs. "This is it."

Jane tossed her head defiantly. She wouldn't for worlds have had him know what she was feeling. Then she walked into the dining-room, head held high, eyes bright and cheeks flaming.

Her reception was all she could have expected and more, for the chorus of "Happy birthday" changed to exclamations of surprise; mother covered her eyes with both hands, and Kenneth, who was incautiously tipping his chair, went straight over backward with a loud crash. The only note of approval came from Susan Trot, who, backing out of the room as she so often did, flung back an awe-struck, "My, ain't she the stylishest thing? Jest like one of those wax-figgers in the shops."

"I didn't know I was going to make such a sensation," said Jane, going around the table to kiss mother while David picked up Kenneth. She had persistently kept her head turned away from her own place at the table, because, as far back as she could remember, there had always been a collection of interesting packages on birthday mornings, and even at fourteen she wouldn't

Jane Stuart, Twin

have scorned such a display. "Is it really so bad, mumsey, that you had to shut your eyes?"

"It isn't bad at all, Jane, darling. You've really done it beautifully. And on your birthday you may wear your hair any way you like. But, oh, Janie, it made you seem so old that just for a minute I thought I couldn't bear it."

"Well, you won't have to stand it long. I wouldn't have any one but the family see me this way for money." Jane was surveying herself in an old-fashioned mirror as she spoke. "Besides, Miss Trot said I look just like a wax lady, and I don't consider that a compliment, though she means it for one. I'm going back to the old way as soon as breakfast is over, for I more than half believe Susan's right, and anyway the whole thing pulls like everything," with which final summing-up Jane turned away from the mirror, and started toward her place at table.

As she did so there was a renewed chorus of "Happy birthday," and she realized at once that they had all been waiting impatiently for her to do this very thing, and that David was red and excited, and that there was a package, and more than one, at her place as well as at his.

"How perfectly lovely," she exclaimed, dropping into her chair, and beginning at once to open a parcel tied with blue ribbon. A long string of

A Double Birthday

tiny sea-shells met her eye, and she looked up to find Judy's conscious gaze fixed upon her. "Why, Judy, you gave me your necklace, the one you and Mr. Chope made. That's just dear of you," and Jane jumped from her chair and ran to kiss her sister. This was part of the birthday formula, and running around the table gave one a fine appetite, as Kenneth had remarked on his last birthday.

"Mother said it was more of a present if you gave something you wanted yourself," Judy observed with resignation. "But don't think I didn't want to give it to you," she added hurriedly. "I can get plenty more shells and make another."

"I'll lend you mine sometimes, and you may borrow my blue beads, too," Jane hastened to say. She was watching David absorbedly as he took off layer after layer of newspaper from a package which, large at first, was rapidly growing very small.

"I don't believe there's anything here," he said with a made-up frown, but at that moment the last paper was unrolled, and something hard lay in his hand. It was a little basket, cut from a peach-stone, and he praised it warmly.

"I made it for you," said Kenneth, who couldn't wait another moment. "At least Mr. Chope and I made it. And there's one just like it for Jane.

Jane Stuart, Twin

We thought she could hang it round her neck on a ribbon, and Davy could wear his on his watch-chain—when he gets one.”

No one was ever anything but grateful for any gift on a Stuart birthday, but Jane swallowed hard at the thought of wearing a peachstone basket hung around her neck. She said all she could about its prettiness and the wonderful skill Kenneth had displayed in making it, but she turned with joyous relief to a collar which mother had embroidered for her, and which was just what she had been wanting.

“Hello, Mrs. Janes, I thought we weren’t going to pay any attention to our birthday,” exclaimed David, examining with delighted interest a collection of six large envelopes tied into cardboard covers with red ribbon. There was a decorative design on the cover done in Jane’s best manner, and the envelopes were lettered “Baseball,” “Birds,” “Stamps,” “Coins,” “History,” “Fishing.”

“I know it, but I couldn’t help it. Those are for the newspaper clippings you’re everlastingly saving. I thought it was time you learned to be neat about something,” Jane ended with a laugh.

“You didn’t do any better than I did,” she went on quickly, as another package disclosed a box of note-paper, with “Best wishes” written on

A Double Birthday

a card in David's neat handwriting. "Just what I've been longing for, as usual, Spinksy. You always hit the mark."

David made an inarticulate sound which, in this instance, stood for pleased satisfaction. His feelings were often too deep to be expressed in words. Besides, he was staring thoughtfully at the last package which remained to him, a small one which had come by mail.

Jane glanced at him curiously. "I've got a package just like it, and a letter in the same handwriting. It's Aunt Caroline's, isn't it? Let's open 'em together. I'm getting hungry."

The enshrouding paper disclosed a box, and the box being opened, there was a nest of tissue paper and cotton on which reposed a little case, and in the case gold cuff-links, just alike except for the initials, and for the fact that Jane's were smaller.

"Ab-so-lutely just what I've been wanting," cried Jane. "Only I hadn't planned anything half so pretty. Aunt Caroline is certainly a darling."

"Why don't you open the note?" suggested mother, interrupting her raptures.

Jane skimmed rapidly through the few lines which met her eye, her changing face expressing surprise, pleasure and mystification. "It's from

Jane Stuart, Twin

that nice Mr. Stevens," she said. "Listen to this."

"MY DEAR MISS JANE:" she read rapidly.

"I hope you haven't forgotten the 'Mr. Stevens' who traveled with the Stuart family from Sterling to Boston. He has by no means forgotten you, and he begs the privilege of sending a little remembrance to you and David with his very best wishes for this double birthday. Also his compliments to Mrs. Stuart and Judy and the unequalled Kenneth."

"Huh!" said the "unequalled" one, looking a little injured. "I don't see what he means by that. I liked him awfully well, and I thought he liked me."

"That's a compliment, isn't it, mother?" said David. He was looking with a puzzled frown at the note which Jane had tossed over to him, and thinking how strange it was that Aunt Caroline and Mr. Stevens should write so much alike.

"I never get enough to eat on birthday mornings," Jane remarked mournfully, "because I have to keep stopping to look at my presents." She was gazing fondly at the cuff-links as she spoke. Suddenly her eyes opened very wide. "Kenneth Stuart, was there anything you didn't tell Mr. Stevens?" she demanded. "How on earth did you happen to mention our birthday?"

A Double Birthday

"I never did," retorted Kenneth hotly. "I shouldn't have remembered when it was, anyway. I've got all I can do to keep track of my own."

"Well, I don't see," Jane began, but a persistently repeated whistle drew all eyes to the window.

"It's Rob," said David. "Excuse me, please, mother. He's coming in to see me about something."

"Jane," warned Judy, arousing that young person from a rapt contemplation of her gifts, "have you forgotten your hair? You said you wouldn't have any one——"

There was the swift push of a chair, a hurried, "Judy, you're a duck," a wild rush into the kitchen and up the back stairs. Safe in her own room Jane took out twenty-seven hairpins, decided to postpone growing older for another year, and did up her hair in the usual way. When she went down-stairs again mother's face and David's thankful expression would have repaid her even if it had been a sacrifice.

David and Rob were on the piazza, and the latter, just going, turned back to congratulate Jane. "Best wishes, Lady Jane. Do you feel as old as the hills?" he inquired. "I don't see any great change," he went on, looking at her critically. "I'm glad you're not like some girls and feel that

Jane Stuart, Twin

you must wad up your hair the minute you're fourteen."

"Davy's been telling," flashed Jane.

"Not a syllable, on my honor," said her twin with his hand on his heart.

"It's just that I have a wonderful knowledge of girl nature," murmured Rob looking at her with intense seriousness. "I know without being told when they're going to begin to pile up their hair—— Here, you young Kenneth, what are you laughing at? You didn't say anything about Jane's hair, did you?"

Kenneth, choking with laughter, escaped from his sister's righteous anger and fled toward the barn. Half-way there he turned to say apologetically, "I told him before I thought, Janesy. He doesn't really know everything."

"Well, I don't seem to be appreciated here, so I'll go," said Rob. "I'm going to have a birthday myself before the month is out."

"How old? Sixteen?" guessed David.

"Uh-huh. Jiminy! I must run. I'm not through with school yet if you two lucky individuals are. Good-bye. See you later."

"He's all right, isn't he?" said David, whose liking for his new friend grew stronger each day. "I've got to do some errands for mother. Want to come, Mrs. Janes?"

A Double Birthday

"I should think you might call me a nicer name than that on my birthday," responded Jane, pretending to feel hurt.

"Well, I will. How would you like 'Birdie' or 'Sunshine'?"

"Horrors! Call me Mrs. Janes all my life rather than those." Jane started toward the door, but turned again to her twin with hand outstretched. "Here's to our fifteenth year, Spinksy," she said. "I'm just as glad as ever that you're my twin."

"Same here. My! When you say fifteenth it sounds ancient, doesn't it? Let's make it a ripping old year, Lady Jane, shall we?"

It was so unlike quiet David to say even so much as this that his twin gave him a quick look of surprise. Something in the steady gray eyes made her squeeze his hand hard, and answer softly, "'Stuart obliges'; will that do, Davy?"

"You bet it will; that's——" But the fervor of his utterance was interrupted by the sudden tooting of a horn, and joyous cries, and much laughter which drew both twins to the other end of the piazza in a hurry.

Between the house and barn were mother, Judy and Susan Trot, all apparently enjoying themselves greatly. In the doorway of the barn was Mr. Chope, his face tied in innumerable knots,

Jane Stuart, Twin

his eyes closed almost tight with laughter. Coming slowly along the driveway was the cause of all this mirth, a small, gay, glittering figure atop an old white horse.

It was Kenneth, arrayed in all the knightly panoply that Mr. Chope's brain could devise and his clever old fingers execute. Sally, too, in the bravery of her shining trappings, seemed to feel the significance of the occasion, and but flicked an ear when the brave knight she bore so proudly blew a fearsome blast on his tin horn.

"Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear——" Kenneth gave up on the last word, and went off into a fit of helpless giggles. "Hear——" he began again with a gasp, but it was no use. Riding close to Jane he leaned from the saddle, and put into her hand a sheet of paper. "Sir—Sir Chope told me to give you this," he gurgled, quite unable to use the knightly form of address which he had practiced so faithfully.

All the others crowded around while Jane unfolded the paper, which in the simplicity of its typewritten message hardly suited the ceremony with which "Sir Chope" had invested it.

It merely said—"Will the Stuart family kindly meet me at the sign of the Twin Pines on the afternoon of June 18th at three o'clock?"

"Who under the sun is 'me' and where are the

A Double Birthday

‘Twin Pines’?” queried Jane, studying the paper with a puzzled air, as though she expected to find some hidden explanation.

“Do you know, Mr. Chope?” David asked suddenly.

The old man, wholly absorbed in watching Jane, started guiltily. “Why, there are two pine-trees ’bout a mile from here that could, so to speak, be called the twin pines,” he answered, busying himself all at once with the readjustment of some of Sally’s ornaments. “I dunno as I ever heard of any ‘me’ bein’ ’round there, though.”

“Mother, I believe you know,” said Jane, catching a gleam of amusement in her mother’s brown eyes.

“If I do I’m not allowed to tell,” answered mother promptly, and with that the children had to be satisfied. Even Kenneth, the willing instrument of Mr. Chope’s love for pageantry, knew no more than the others, and found it harder to stifle his curiosity than any of them. Having tried his blandishments on mother, Mr. Chope and Susan, and failed signally in each attempt, he resigned himself to his fate, and waited for afternoon with what patience he could command.

It was not a long walk to the twin pines, so Mr. Chope said, and it certainly was a pleasant one. They went by the house where the ladies made

Jane Stuart, Twin

bayberry candles, and through a meadow, and up a little, and down a little, until they came to a brook. They followed the brook to where it turned sharply, and there was a narrow log bridge to be crossed before the path could be found again. Then, almost directly, they were in the real woods, with tall, shadowing trees, and a carpet of moss and ferns and a hundred little growing things.

“O-oh!” Jane cried ecstatically, trying to take in all the sweet, woodsy fragrance with one long breath. “Why haven’t we been here before, I should like to know? I see something white through the trees. I wonder if it’s a tent. I——” and then she turned to her twin and clapped her hands almost in his astonished face. “Spinksy, I believe I know who’s here. Come on quick with me.”

David’s slower mind failed to grasp the situation, but he responded to Jane’s insistent demand with his usual readiness, and they were off at breakneck speed. Kenneth pursued them as fast as his shorter legs would carry him. Judy, too, ran, with an energy which delighted her mother’s heart, for it seemed to prove how much sea-air and the out-of-door life were doing for her.

“How do you know who’s here?” asked David, when they had nearly reached the tent.

“Who—who was it said that he had sometimes

A Double Birthday

camped near Belhaven?" panted his twin, triumph sparkling in her eye. "Let's wait a—a minute for Judy and Ken. They'd like to be first, and, anyway, I'm nearly dead."

Jane dropped on the ground with her eyes fixed expectantly on the white tent. A moment later she jumped up. "What did I tell you?" she demanded excitedly, as a man came around from the other side of it, and seeing the approaching party waved his hat in joyous greeting.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. STEVENS

KENNETH, reaching the place where he could see plainly the white hair and pleasant face of the man coming toward them, uttered a whoop of joyous surprise, and ran with renewed energy until he fell into the arms outstretched to meet him. A moment later the twins arrived and shook hands breathlessly.

"This is the best thing that's happened yet on our birthday," said Jane, looking with a warm welcome into the friendly blue eyes of the stranger. Then she added shyly, "We thought our cuff-links were perfectly lovely, but it's much nicer to have Mr. Stevens himself."

"Thank you, Miss Jane. I can tell you I worked hard to get ready to set up housekeeping on your birthday. If it hadn't been for Mr. ——" Mr. Stevens stopped abruptly, and stepped forward to meet Mrs. Stuart and Judy. Mr. Chope, coming up at the same time, touched his hat with the air of a complete stranger, and walked off by himself.

Mr. Stevens

"Where are the twin pines?" asked Judy as soon as the first greetings were over. "We'll have four twins together when we find those," she added.

"Why, so we shall. Would you believe it, I hadn't thought of that. Come this way." Mr. Stevens started around the tent as he spoke. "I'll introduce you to the twins, and to my camp-mate.

"Camp-mate first, hey, old fellow?" he went on as a huge, tawny collie rose from his sleep in front of the tent and came toward them. There was none of the exuberant joy of a younger dog about him, but a dignified reserve apparent in the slow approach, and a friendly, questioning look in the soft brown eyes.

"Shake hands with the ladies, Larry," said Mr. Stevens, and the great paw was lifted obediently and placed in Jane's outstretched hand.

"Oh, you darling," she said, feeling as if some very important personage were granting her his friendship. "Spinksy, just feel that lovely soft paw."

Larry, without waiting to shake hands with the other ladies, gave his paw to David, and then, to the surprise of every one, went as close to him as he could get, and laid his great head against the boy's side.

Jane Stuart, Twin

“Well,” said Mr. Stevens with a little whistle of surprise, “Larry is usually polite, but I never saw him make love to a stranger like that before.”

“That’s because he knows that Davy is the nicest ever,” said Jane promptly. “I’m used to being neglected on Spinksy’s account,” she added with an air of great melancholy. “Perhaps the twin pines will like me just as well as my popular brother, though.”

“Allow me,” said Mr. Stevens, wheeling suddenly, and leading the way to where two youthful pine-trees, identical in size and appearance, were sturdily growing. “Let me introduce to the Stuart family Miss Jane Pine and Mr. David Pine—twins,” he added, with his genial smile.

“Glad to see you, old fellow,” said David, grasping one of Mr. Pine’s outstretched branches and shaking it solemnly. “I hope you and your sister will come over and see us some day.”

“Dear me, I thought I was tall, but just look at Miss Pine.” Jane was measuring her height against the slender tree as she spoke. “I’m going to have her for my tree-sister. Perhaps there’s a nice little dryad living inside, who will come out and play with me some day.”

“You mean a druid, don’t you?” suggested Kenneth. Then, as every one laughed, he added resignedly, “Well, I always get mixed up ’bout

Mr. Stevens

dryads and druids, anyway. I don't see why they named them so much alike."

"Mr. Stevens, do you live in this tent all summer?" asked Judy, who had been making a tour of exploration all by herself.

"No, just once in a while all summer. My wife likes to come to the hotel at Belhaven Beach, and as I'm not fond of a steady diet of hotel life I've pitched my tent here. I own this land, and I've been thinking that perhaps I'd put up a small log cabin here this summer if I could find some nice boys to help me."

"Do you mean us—Davy and me?" demanded Kenneth eagerly.

"Yes, you and David and Rob Randall and Ned Holt and one or two of those other boys that Rob chums with. Jane and Carol, too, if they like."

"Why, how do you know all those fellows?" David was gazing at Mr. Stevens with puzzled eyes.

"To be sure, how do I? I don't wonder you ask. Well, you see I've camped here before and—and I always make it a point to know young people wherever I go. That makes it all plain, doesn't it? And now, please, sit down on the pine-needles, and I'll serve you some of the lemonade I've been brewing."

With the boys to help this was soon accom-

Jane Stuart, Twin

plished, and while they drank the delicious lemonade and ate wafers, Mr. Stevens told them delightful stories of camp-life and fishing which made them all long to be woodsmen. Kenneth's enjoyment was somewhat marred by the fact that he couldn't find Mr. Chope and give him some lemonade, too. Aside from that he was perfectly happy as he lay on his back, and gazed straight up at the patches of blue sky that showed between the trees.

"Didn't I tell you, Jane," said David dreamily, when there was a pause in the conversation, "didn't I tell you that something would happen to make us remember this birthday? Well, this is it."

"You've told me that once already," giggled Jane. "I begin to feel that perhaps I shan't forget my fourteenth birthday after all."

"There comes Mr. Chope, Ken," said mother suddenly. "Now you can give him some lemonade."

Kenneth jumped up in a hurry, filled a glass, and started to meet his friend. To his surprise Mr. Chope took scant notice of him, and none at all of his offering, but walked on as fast as he could to where the other members of the party were still sitting.

"Mr. Eliot—Mr. Eliot," he began breathlessly as soon as he got within speaking distance. "It's

Mr. Stevens

jest as I told you 'twould be. The boys have broken down that fencing at the other end of your land, and they've been tramping 'round there good."

"That's too bad, Mr. Chope," answered Mr. Stevens with surprising tranquillity. "What are we going to do about it?"

But before the excited old man could offer any solution, Judy, who had hitched herself around where she could look straight into Mr. Stevens' face, demanded urgently, "Why did he call you 'Mr. Eliot'?"

At the question Mr. Chope's absorbed expression changed to one of horrified surprise and he said hastily, "You don't—you don't mean to say that I called him 'Mr. Eliot.' Why, I must be gittin' kinder feeble in intelleck to forgit a man's name like ——" the words died away indistinctly as Mr. Stevens' hearty laugh rang out.

"They caught us fairly that time, Mr. Chope," he said with evident enjoyment of the situation. "I answered up promptly to the name you gave me, so I'm in it, too. Never mind, I was intending to make explanations anyway, and you've only helped to break the ice."

He turned as he finished speaking and faced the expectant Stuarts with twinkling eyes. "Children," he said with a funnily penitent air, "I'm

Jane Stuart, Twin

your great step—no, your step great-uncle by marriage, Stephen Eliot. Won't you please take me into the family, and try to forget that I'm not the real thing?"

"If it was a whole flight of great steps you'd be the realest kind of an uncle," said David, quite carried out of himself by this joyful discovery. "Mother, did you know? You're sitting there looking so wise and smily, I believe you did."

"I had begun to guess," confessed Mrs. Stuart, "some time ago, but I could never make Mr. Chope help me out at all. But when Uncle Stephen," she used the name half shyly, "showed that he knew the boys and girls around here, and of course when Mr. Chope ——"

The old man wagged his head disgustedly. "I ain't fit to be trusted with secrets and joyful surprises," he said dolefully. "I wouldn't have thought wild horses could have dragged that outer me."

"Yes, you are, too, fit to be trusted. I'm going to think up a secret to tell you right away," comforted Kenneth impetuously. "But why," he went on, turning to Mr. Eliot, "why didn't you tell me that you were our uncle when I began to talk to you on the train? You said you were Mr. Stevens."

"I think I suggested that you might call me

Mr. Stevens

that," Uncle Stephen amended gently. "If you remember, you told me a great many things about yourself and your family before you asked me anything about myself."

"We all did," interposed Jane with eager honesty. "Ken wasn't the only one."

"That's true," said Mr. Eliot, liking her all the better for trying to lighten the shadow which was clouding her brother's sensitive face. "But very early in our acquaintance Kenneth gave me the impression that you hadn't much affection for your Aunt Caroline, nor for her husband, and, to tell the truth, I hated to confess that I was the man."

"That was the way we felt then because we hated to leave Sterling," Jane admitted, hanging her head. "It was mostly my fault, too, that the others felt so. But now ——" the emphasis on the last word, and the light of comradeship in her eyes were enough to tell how she was feeling at the present moment.

"Thank you, Jane," the newly discovered uncle answered, stretching out a hand to her as he spoke. "Everything is clear between us now, isn't it? You see I thought if I could make you all like me as Mr. Stevens, you wouldn't cast me off when you found out the truth."

"Then probably it was you Ken saw at the depot the day we came," David burst out suddenly. He

Jane Stuart, Twin

had been thinking things over quietly ever since he made his last remark. "And I suppose you gave us Judy's kitten, and Ken's dog, and Jane's sketch-book, and my dandy fishing-rod."

Uncle Stephen looked guiltily conscious of the truth of all these accusations.

"Then it must have been you who wrote the rainy-day cards for the trunks, and told Mr. Chope about them," said Jane. "And I thought all the time it was Aunt Caroline and wrote thankful notes to her about it."

"Your Aunt Caroline couldn't understand those notes about the presents and the trunks until I explained matters," chuckled Mr. Eliot. "She came near writing you that she had no hand in it, but I begged her not to be a spoil-sport."

It occurred to Jane that here was the reason why Aunt Caroline had not answered her notes. In all honesty she would have had to explain that she was not the giver, and, of course, she didn't want to spoil Uncle Stephen's plans. Jane felt like apologizing as she realized that what she had thought disregard was really the helping out of a pleasant surprise for them. A sudden vision of Carol danced through her mind, and again she wondered, and wished she might consult some one about it. Perhaps Uncle Stephen already knew that Carol was an adopted child. Perhaps —

Mr. Stevens

"Jane, what are you thinking about?" David had rolled over on the pine-needles and was pulling at his sister's sleeve. "I've been watching you for the last three minutes, and you've scowled and smiled and looked as if you were thinking out very big problems. Tell your little twin all about it."

"I can't," answered Jane, coming back to her surroundings in sudden haste. "I only wish I could." Then she added teasingly, "Oh, Spinksy, haven't I heard you say that something would happen to make us remember our birthday? What do you think about finding an uncle?"

"That was exactly what I meant," affirmed David solemnly. "I had forgotten to mention it this time. But, say, isn't it great to have him for an uncle?" he added in a lower tone.

"I should say so. And now I want to see Aunt Caroline, don't you?"

David nodded doubtfully, listening meanwhile to what Uncle Stephen was telling mother.

"You see I haven't much of a camp-outfit," he was saying, "and that makes it easy for me to start in or break up when I please. Whenever I get tired of it, or want to go off somewhere, Mr. Chope is always ready to collect my few belongings and the tent, and keep them in his barn until I want them again. Just now your Aunt Caroline is visiting friends, so I shall be here for a while."

Jane Stuart, Twin

Mother and Uncle Stephen walked off a little way talking earnestly, and David turned his attention to his twin again.

"Say, Jane, let's——" he interrupted himself suddenly, and got on his feet. "Somebody called," he asserted. "Sounded like a girl's voice. Do you suppose Carol——?"

"She's away. Probably 'twas Ken or Judy you heard. What were you going to say?"

"No, there it is again. And I can see a girl running. Get up, Janey, and look. You can see farther than I can."

"It's Susan Trot," declared Jane, after a moment of inspection. "She's in a great hurry, and she's got something in her hand. It's"—his sister waited so long that David was quite impatient—"it's an envelope. She sees me now and she's waving it. Perhaps I've got a telegram or a special delivery letter from Sterling." Jane was off like a flash, with David in close pursuit.

"It's—it's a special delivery letter for your ma," panted Miss Trot as soon as she got within speaking distance. Jane, visibly disappointed, stopped short for an instant, then ran on with increased speed.

"We'll take it to her," said the twins, reaching the breathless Susan at almost the same moment, and speaking with one voice. They dashed off

Mr. Stevens

again immediately, but David turned for a word to the tired messenger. "Drop right down here and stay until you get your breath," he prescribed.

"I—didn't—want to leave the house—alone long," said Miss Trot jerkily. "I guess—I better be startin'."

"Don't you stir till I get back here. No one will run away with the house," scolded David, and then he was off, too, leaving the girl to look after him with grateful eyes.

The letter proved to be from Mrs. Wilton, mother's most intimate friend in Sterling. She was to sail on the next day for Europe, and wanted Mrs. Stuart to spend this night with her in a hotel in Boston.

"Oh, I wish I could." Mrs. Stuart looked up from the letter with eyes full of desire. "If it weren't for leaving the children ——"

"Belhaven's the safest place in the world to leave them in," Uncle Stephen assured her heartily. "Mr. Chope will be right in the barn, and if—if it would make you feel any easier about them I'll come over and spend the night in the house."

Mother fancied that she could detect in his voice a note of regret at the idea of giving up his night in the woods, and she hesitated a little before answering. "If you only would," she began slowly, and then David's face caught her eye and

Jane Stuart, Twin

she stopped. "I believe, after all, that we shan't need to trouble you so much as that, Uncle Stephen," she said cheerfully. "David and Jane are very dependable, and ——"

"Of course we can take care of everything," interrupted David, relief apparent in every word. "Naturally we'd be glad to have Uncle Stephen there," he added politely, "but we can't always have him, and mother ought not to feel so tied to us."

"We're fourteen whole years to-day, mumsey," suggested Jane, quite as if her mother hadn't heard it before. "And Mr. Chope is always saying that Susan is 'a whole team and the little dog under the wagon.'"

Mrs. Stuart laughed. "I feel quite easy in my mind after that, and now we must hurry home. If we have supper a little earlier than usual I can easily take that eight o'clock train."

Later on the twins escorted Mrs. Stuart to the station, and found that they had all hurried to such good purpose that there was still a quarter of an hour before train-time. It was not tedious to wait in the pleasant June twilight, for the little square near the station was unusually full of people, and, as Jane said, seemed quite citified. On one side a small crowd had gathered about a wagon in which stood a man talking, and evidently try-

Mr. Stevens

ing to sell something. The three Stuarts strolled over there, and stood at the edge of the crowd.

The man was a vendor of tooth-powder, put up in gaudy-looking bottles, and his remarks were so good-naturedly funny that he kept the little throng of people laughing continuously. His genial manner made good business, too, for his assistant, a dark, melancholy-looking boy of about fifteen, who was threading his way among the bystanders with bottles of tooth-powder for sale, returned to the wagon frequently for a fresh supply.

Once, when the boy climbed into the wagon to get more bottles, his employer seized him by the arm and made him face the laughing crowd.

"Show your teeth, boy," he commanded good-humoredly enough.

The boy obeyed promptly, disclosing teeth so white and perfect that a murmur of admiration ran through the crowd. Mrs. Stuart, pitying him with all her heart, suddenly found that the dark sorrowful eyes, which at first had gazed beyond the people around him, were now apparently fixed on her and the children with an expression she could not understand.

"Here you are, ladies and gentlemen," the man rattled on, "the most extra-ordinary example of what the faithful use of our tooth-powder will do.

Jane Stuart, Twin

You use it every day, don't you, sonny? Couldn't live without it, hey?"

The boy shook his head mechanically, and, as he did so, put his hand to his forehead, and turned so white that even the twilight could not hide his pallor.

His employer caught his arm as he pitched forward a little in getting off the wagon. "You go lie down for a while on that grass over there," he said with some anxiety in his voice, but the boy only shook his head dumbly, picked up the bottles, and went about his business again.

"People with fine, perfect teeth are strong-willed," the man said, going back to his jesting manner, though he still looked uneasy. "Now a tooth-powder that gives teeth like that makes for success, don't you see? You ain't never goin' to give up while there's anythin' doin'. This powder is made of the purest ——" and so on with a rambling, joking speech, full of sly hits at the people listening, which made them laugh unrestrainedly, and forget the white face of the boy silently pushing his way among them.

Mrs. Stuart and the twins went slowly back to the station, hardly speaking until they reached the platform. Then David suddenly burst forth with righteous indignation, "Wasn't that the toughest thing to see that poor chap have to stand up there

Mr. Stevens

and show his teeth? He looked as if he hated everybody."

"That's just it," answered mother, recognizing all at once the expression that had puzzled her. "When he seemed to be looking at us it made me feel that we had no right to be happy and comfortable when he was so miserable. Oh, twinnies, when I look at him it makes me want to hug you both hard, and to know that Judy and Ken are safe and sound."

"Don't look so worried, Spinksy. She isn't going to embrace you right here on the station platform, are you, mumsey?" Jane's laugh rang out at the sight of David's apologetic smile. At the same moment some one pushed against her in passing, and she turned to gaze straight into the eyes of the boy about whom they had been talking.

"Do you suppose he could have heard what we were saying?" she whispered, pinching David's arm, and nodding toward the boy who was just disappearing into the depot. "He looked at me with such—why, just as if he despised me."

"Probably the poor fellow is sore at every one," said David of the understanding heart. "Perhaps he thought you were laughing at him."

Jane didn't have time to answer, for the train came in just then and they were both occupied in getting mother safely started. Afterward as they

Jane Stuart, Twin

struck out at a good gait toward home, Jane turned back for one more look at the man in the wagon. He was still standing there, still gesticulating, and it was easy to imagine that the flow of rude philosophy was going on as it had before. While they looked a boyish figure detached itself from the group of spectators, and climbed into the wagon.

“He’s back again,” commented Jane with a little sigh. “I had begun to plan that he would go on the train with mother, and she’d be perfectly lovely to him, and he’d turn out to be the son of an English duke, or something ——”

“Oh, come on,” David said soberly, interrupting her without even the tribute of the smile which he usually gave to her airy flights. “I don’t like to look at him. It makes me ——” and then, without finishing his sentence, he walked on so fast that his sister was obliged almost to run in order to keep up with him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TOOTH-POWDER MAN

THE cool stillness of the clear June evening fell about them so softly that even Jane stopped talking after a while, and the walk home was finished almost in silence.

As they reached the last corner Kenneth came running to meet them and grasping a hand of each swung along between them as they walked.

"It's awful lonesome without mother," he remarked gloomily. "Judy isn't feeling very well, either. She's sitting on the steps, and she won't speak to me—nor even to Susan."

"Have you been teasing her?" demanded David sternly.

"No. Honest I haven't. Only—only she wanted me to play jacks with her, and I wanted to stay with Mr. Chope."

"And which did you do?" Jane knew without asking, but she enjoyed her younger brother's way of wriggling out of unpleasant situations.

"I? Oh, well"—Kenneth suddenly developed a violent cough—"well, I couldn't hurt Mr. Chope's feelings, could I?" he ended chokingly.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"How about Judy's feelings?" queried Jane, feeling very virtuous and elder-sisterly as she hurried up the front walk, and sat down on the steps with her arm around Judy. The latter was sitting with elbows on her knees and face buried in her hands, and for some time she didn't respond at all to Jane's solicitous inquiries.

At last she said with a little shivering sob, "My—my head aches dreadfully. I want my mother."

"Come on up-stairs, Judy, and I'll do for you just what mother does when you have a headache," coaxed Jane softly. "Perhaps it won't be a bad one, because you're a great deal better than you used to be, you know."

"I'm not any better to-night, I know I'm not. And you can't do the way mother does, because you're not mother."

"Don't be ——" Jane began, but David interposed.

"I'll give you a ride up-stairs, and then Jane can help you undress, and fix up your head, and before you know it you'll be asleep. You wouldn't want mother to think she can't leave us at all, would you?"

"No, I shouldn't. It's that old 'Stuart obliges,' I s'pose, isn't it, Davy?" and at her brother's nod Judy rose slowly from the steps, and held up two

The Tooth-Powder Man

limp arms. In her secret heart she was enjoying the attention heaped upon her by the twins, who ordinarily didn't attach enough importance to her headaches to suit her. "I think Ken better come to bed, too," she said languidly as David took her in his arms and started into the house. "If he waits till I get all ready to go to sleep he'll wake me up again."

"Oh, I don't have ——" protested Kenneth, but Jane flung a persuasive arm around his neck, and put her cheek to his. "Say, Ken," she coaxed softly, "it'll only make a few minutes' difference for you, anyway. And we want Judy to go to sleep as soon as she can, because she mustn't be all tired out and cross when mother gets home in the morning. You can just believe I'm going to bed when Judy is comfy, for I'm as tired as anything, and ——"

Kenneth turned his head suddenly and pecked at the soft cheek. "You're all right, Janey," he murmured. "I'll go. Only I wish I'd played jackstones with Judy when she wanted me to. If I had perhaps she wouldn't have had the headache." With which bit of unconscious wisdom Kenneth slid into the house and stole up-stairs with surprising stillness.

For the next half-hour Jane was quite sure that she was a born nurse and comforter, for Judy

Jane Stuart, Twin

proved unexpectedly docile, the hot head became cool, and the pain departed. Unfortunately, however, nurse instead of patient grew sleepy, and at the end of an hour Jane was fighting the oncoming drowsiness, while Judy, quite comfortable now, was all ready to be entertained.

Jane fixed the shades for the fourth time, got another drink for her sister, and then remarked with an irrepressible yawn, "I guess I'll go to bed now, Judy, and I'll sleep in mother's room so that I can be close to you. If you want me you can call, and I'll come right away."

"I'm not a bit sleepy, and my head begins to feel worse again," warned Judy solemnly. "I shouldn't be surprised if I stayed awake all night."

"Oh, nonsense, you won't." Jane realized that her tone was less soothing than she intended it to be. "You know just as soon as the lights are out you'll feel sleepy," she went on more gently, "and you'll drop off before you know it."

Judy didn't answer, and she received a good-night kiss with an unresponsive dignity which boded ill for her sister's comfort.

As soon as her head touched the pillow Jane was asleep, and it seemed to her she was dragged back from the farthest ends of the world when Judy's voice managed to penetrate her slumbers.

The Tooth-Powder Man

"Jane, Jane, I've called you a hundred times," she said fretfully. "I can't get to sleep, and I'm hot and thirsty."

Jane, jumping out of bed in a room to which she was not accustomed, staggered drowsily in the wrong direction, and hit her head against the high old-fashioned mantel. "Ouch," she groaned, coming wide awake at once. "You'll have to get up and take care of my head, Judy, if I'm not careful. Now, what is it you want me to do for you, honey?" She was quite surprised at her own patience. "My temper must be improving," she said to herself as she went out in the hall to fill her sister's glass. "Perhaps that crack on the head knocked the crossness out of me."

"I wish you'd make this room cooler," Judy demanded, taking only a sip of water, and pushing the glass away. "And I think you might tell me a story. Mother would."

Jane shut her lips tightly to keep back the words that wanted to come. Then she said coaxingly, "Judy, I'll play any game you like for one whole hour to-morrow if you'll only try to go to sleep now. I've opened the other window in the hall, and perhaps that will make your room cooler. I can't do anything more unless I make a hole in the side of the house, and Aunt Caroline wouldn't like that."

Jane Stuart, Twin

She smiled as brightly as her drowsiness would permit at the sober face on the pillow, but Judy saw nothing amusing in the idea of making a hole in the house. "Just think about Uncle Stephen," Jane went on desperately. "I'll tell you. Plan a party for our new uncle. You're awfully good about planning parties."

Judy seemed to brighten under the influence of this judicious compliment, and Jane snapped off the light and went back to mother's room.

She was almost into bed when her sister called again, "I wish you'd leave the light burning in that room. You know, the one you can make small or big. Mother does sometimes when I can't sleep."

Jane, who hated a light in her room, got up without a word and turned it on. Then she crept into bed. This time she didn't go to sleep so quickly. After a while the stillness in her sister's room made her think that Judy must be asleep, and she got up to find her breathing peacefully, and apparently good for all night.

She went back to bed with a sigh of thankfulness, stopping on the way to look at mother's little clock. "Goodness! only eleven o'clock," she yawned. "I thought it was the middle of the night."

Fairly off to sleep again, Jane came to her feet

The Tooth-Powder Man

with a bound at the sound of a loud crash in the hall. For an instant she was so frightened that she could only stand still, trembling, and not daring to move in any direction. Then, mingled with Judy's scared whimper, came a disgusted remark in Kenneth's voice, and David spoke.

Kenneth, sleepy-eyed, grinned sheepishly when Jane went flying out into the hall. "It was that idiot of a water-pitcher," he explained. "It was just on the edge of the table, and I barely touched it when it fell off and smashed itself."

"I suppose that was my fault, Ken," confessed his sister. "I was so sleepy that I didn't know where I was putting it the last time I got a drink for Judy."

"Well, it wasn't mine then," avowed Kenneth with some relief. "I'm awful sorry I made such a racket, though. I wonder it didn't wake up Miss Trot."

Even as he spoke that young person's head peered cautiously around a door at the end of the hall. "Did anythin' go off?" she questioned. "I thought I heard a noise."

"It's 'all over but the shouting,' now, Susan," answered David with a laugh, and the head disappeared.

"What time is it?" asked Kenneth. "I feel as if I'd been asleep a year."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Well, I don't," Jane said ruefully, "but perhaps this time we can finish up the night. It's only ten minutes after eleven," she added, as she looked at the clock again.

"I haven't slept one single moment, and I want a drink," announced Judy with a distressed-looking face.

"Why, yes you have, Judy. I came here and looked at you before I went to sleep the last time." Jane felt quite wide awake over her sister's mistaken statement.

"No, I wasn't asleep. And I want a drink." Judy was beginning to cry softly.

"But, Julia Stuart, I ——"

Judy cried harder. She hated to be called "Julia."

"I'll get her a drink, and you go to bed, Jane," called David. "I've had a bang-up night already."

Jane stole off to bed thankfully, too tired to protest. She stayed awake long enough to hear David take a drink to Kenneth; then the murmur of his voice as he talked to Judy soothed her into slumber once more.

It might have been minutes or hours, Jane couldn't tell which, when she suddenly sat up in bed and tried to adjust her sleepy eyes and brain to her surroundings. Some one in the room was talking. Almost at once she saw that it was

The Tooth-Powder Man

David, and that he had raised the screen and was leaning out of the window. Wholly awake now, she slipped on her kimono and stole across the room to stand beside him.

“You see I thought I could git to the next town where I know some folks,” a man under the window was saying eagerly. “Then the poor little chap got so bad I turned back, and this was the first house with a light. Now if you could take him in here while I go for a doctor, you’ll be doin’ a great thing for a sufferin’ fellow mortal.”

It was bright moonlight and Jane could see the man quite plainly. Her gaze flew past him to the street, where, directly in front of their house, a wagon was standing.

“Davy, it’s the tooth-powder man,” she said softly, pinching her brother’s arm. “And that must be the boy ——”

“Yes’m, it is,” interrupted the man. “And I’m at my wit’s end because I don’t dare to drive him round any more, and I must git a doctor. Now if you could only ——”

“Of course we can,” said David, deciding matters without more delay. “I’ll come down and help you in a minute, and you see if you can wake Mr. Chope. He’s in the barn. And, Jane, you get Susan up and have a bed ready.”

Before Jane could reach the back of the house,

Jane Stuart, Twin

Susan had been aroused by the stranger's vigorous pounding on the barn door, and was already preparing to investigate. At first she wouldn't admit the possibility of bringing the sick boy into the house.

"No, no, I couldn't have it when your ma is away, and I'm responsible for you," she said, getting her clothes on in great haste. "S'pose it should be anythin' catchin' and you children should get it. I'd want to die. He can go in the barn."

"Oh, not in the barn." Jane was in despair at the idea. "I'll see that the children don't go near him until we find out, and mother would have him brought into the house, I'm sure."

"Well—then—there's a room in this part of the house," Miss Trot said jerkily. "He can be brought up the back stairs. Here's some sheets—and pillow-slips. You put 'em on while I run down and help so's that blessed brother of yours won't have to touch him." She piloted Jane into a room near her own, turned on the light, threw open all the windows to the sweet air, had one of the sheets on the bed in a twinkling and snatched the other before Jane had done more than unfold it. "You fix the pillows," she flung back as she ran out of the room, "and then you scoot into the front part and shut that hall door between."

The Tooth-Powder Man

Jane, much impressed by Miss Trot's capacity, did exactly as she was told, and then hurried into the other part of the house to see what was going on outside. She expected to hear a voice from Judy's room as she went by, but that young person was sleeping as sweetly as if perfect stillness reigned.

As she approached the window Jane could hear Susan's voice still arguing, this time with David, whom she was resolutely barring from the near neighborhood of the wagon.

"No, Mr. David, I ain't going to let 'em even bring him into the house unless you promise to keep away till after your mother gets home. You know yourself that 'twouldn't be fair for you to catch anythin' and then p'raps give it to the others."

David stood back irresolutely. It was hard to be kept back like this by a girl when the helpful spirit was strong upon him. Then his good sense triumphed. "All right, Susan," he said, eyeing Mr. Chope and the other man, who were just lifting the unconscious boy from the wagon. "They don't seem to need me, anyway. I'll go into the house."

The twins watched them from the window while Susan, relieved of her worst anxiety, flew into the house in advance of the men. A little later the

Jane Stuart, Twin

tooth-powder man came out hastily and ran across the lawn. Springing into his wagon he started toward the center of the town as fast as his tired old horse could go.

"He's gone for the doctor. I suppose I might have done that," sighed David, who was still longing to be actively useful.

His sister made no answer. Her head was against the side of the window, her eyes closed.

"Janey." David gave her a gentle shake. "Janey, you go to bed and I'll watch for the doctor."

"Will you—promise—to call me—when he comes?" Jane, opening her eyes with a start, could hardly get out the words for sleepiness. "It's 'most breakfast-time, isn't it?"

As if in answer to her question the clock in the hall solemnly struck twelve.

"That can't be right," protested Jane, trying to fight off her overpowering drowsiness. "I remember telling Kenneth that it was ten minutes after eleven"—she stopped for a satisfying yawn—"and since then I've had at least two nights."

"You hadn't been asleep ten minutes when that man drove up here," explained David. "Now go and lie down, that's a good girl, and I'll promise to wake you when the doctor comes."

It was not David, however, but the swift ap-

The Tooth-Powder Man

proach of an automobile which waked both of them a half-hour later. The doctor had arrived alone, and the twins saw Mr. Chope come out from the back door to meet him. After a while the tooth-powder man drove up, hitched his horse, and disappeared in the house.

Jane, wide awake once more, caught the sound of the opening of the door which Miss Trot had so faithfully kept shut.

"It's the doctor—coming through this way," she said. "Come out in the hall, Spinksy, and meet him.

"Oh, it's Dr. Reed, isn't it?" she went on joyously. "I met you at Polly's house. You're Polly's father, aren't you?"

The tall man smiled down at her with a very fatherly look in his eyes. "Yes, I live at Polly's house, and I'm her father. Sometimes I think that's the most important part of my life—being the father of Polly.

"And now, young folks—let me see, it's Jane and—and ——" David supplied his name and the doctor went on: "Now, Jane and David, the best thing you can do is to go to bed and sleep forty knots an hour for the rest of the night. You can't do anything for that poor fellow in the other room. He's going to be taken care of by the smartest girl and two of the kindest men I know.

Jane Stuart, Twin

Susan Trot"—Dr. Reed paused to laugh softly at some recollection of the energetic Miss Trot—"well, she's a born nurse. She lived with a family over on the Cooper road, you know, and she took care of one of the children last winter in a way that would have done credit to any one."

"Do you think the—the tooth-powder man's boy is going to get well?" questioned Jane anxiously.

"Yes, I think so. It's hard to say anything decisive about him to-night. I shall be over again in the morning, and in the meantime you do just as Susan says, and keep away from that part of the house. I don't in the least believe that he has anything contagious, but it's best to be on the safe side."

David, coming up from locking the front door after the doctor, found his twin leaning against the doorway of their mother's room, and meditatively fingering the yellow braid which hung over one shoulder.

"The first thing in the morning some of us must go over and tell Uncle Stephen all about it," he announced. "Seems as if we found an uncle just in time, doesn't it?"

"Yes," murmured Jane dreamily. "And mother'll be here by that early train, and she'll make everything all right."

The Tooth-Powder Man

“If you were only on rollers I’d run you right into bed.” David was eyeing his sister apprehensively. “I’m afraid you’ll go to sleep standing up.”

Jane smiled at him with lazy sweetness. “Spinksy, didn’t I tell you there would be something to make us remember our fourteenth birthday? Well, this is it.”

CHAPTER XV

THE CAPTAIN

It was broad day and brilliant sunshine when Jane opened her eyes the next morning to find Kenneth standing by her bed with a tray, and Judy bearing a cup of cocoa.

“David said we had to let you sleep this morning,” announced the latter importantly, “because I kept you up so much last night.”

“Did you?” murmured Jane, not half awake yet, and sleepily wondering why she was in mother’s room and why —

“Goodness!” she said as the whole story of the night flashed into her mind. “What time is it? Why did you let me sleep? I’ll be up in a jiffy.”

“It’s half-past nine, and the boy’s a little more comfortable, and the tooth-powder man’s going to stay till mother comes, and she’ll be here in half an hour, and Davy’s gone for Uncle Stephen,” said Kenneth, piling up the items of news in such breathless haste that Judy, who wanted to tell part of it herself, could only gasp and look at him reproachfully.

The Captain

“Goodness!” said Jane again. “I must hurry. It was perfectly sweet of you to bring up my breakfast. Please set it down anywhere and skip, will you?”

She was splashing in cold water before they were fairly down-stairs, and dressed with such rapidity that her cocoa was still hot by the time she was ready to eat her breakfast.

When she went down Uncle Stephen and David were coming up the walk. Mr. Chope and Sally, bringing mother, were in sight, the doctor’s automobile stood in front of the house, and the tooth-powder man was just emerging from the back door.

All the children flew to meet their mother. “Oh, mumsey, I feel as if you’d been away a year,” murmured Jane as she and David helped her out of the carriage.

“The tooth-powder man is Mr. Bobbin, and I know him of old,” said Uncle Stephen coming to greet Mrs. Stuart. “He comes to Belhaven once or twice a year with something to sell, but tooth-powder is a new venture.”

“Let’s sit on the piazza and hear about the boy,” Mrs. Stuart proposed. “Mr. Chope says the man is anxious to tell me as much as he can of him.”

Mr. Bobbin plunged into his story as soon as they were seated. “I found him in a boardin’-house in New York State ’bout three months ago,”

Jane Stuart, Twin

he began. "I was stayin' over night, and he'd been there three or four days tryin' to get work in the town. He told me right plunk off that he'd run away from home, but he said his mother knew he was goin' to, and she'd given him a little money to start with.

"I guess he was pretty near at the end of that when I found him, and he was mighty glad to hire out to me for a dollar a week and his keep. I couldn't help likin' the little feller from the start, and the minute my eye lit on them perfect teeth I knew he was the boy for me." Mr. Bobbin paused for a moment as though meditating on his quick eye for business, and his audience waited impatiently.

"Where was his father? Didn't he have any father?" Kenneth asked, feeling that the silence had lasted long enough.

"It was worse than not having any," said the tooth-powder man solemnly. "The woman he called his mother really wasn't so, but some one who had adopted him when he was a baby. Afterward she got married and her husband didn't like the boy and was cruel to him. So finally she was kinder relieved to have him go off and she helped him all she could. And mind you, 'twasn't till the day before he left that she let out to him that she really wasn't his mother."

The Captain

"Did he feel sorry about that—does he care?" queried Jane breathlessly.

"Well, he was some sorry, p'raps, but more glad, I guess," answered Mr. Bobbin, surveying her benevolently. "He always said she was good to him, but he kinder let fall, without actually meanin' to, that he'd an idee that real mothers were a little different from her. And he was pleased to pieces to git rid of thinkin' that he was even that much tied to the man!"

Mr. Bobbin turned to Mrs. Stuart and Mr. Eliot, his good-natured face full of righteous wrath. "Ef you could have seen that little chap's back when I first got hold on him," he murmured pitifully. "It took me weeks to git it righted. I've been hopin' ever sence I'd meet that man one of these fine days."

"It was fortunate for the poor boy that he fell in with you," said Mrs. Stuart, smiling unsteadily, and looking at him with eyes suddenly full of tears. David, sitting on the edge of the piazza at her feet, put his head back against her, and her arm went around him thankfully.

"You didn't tell us what his name is," said Judy, breaking the silence.

"Those people he lived with called him Fred, but he didn't want to be named that any more. He said it reminded him too much of the man,

Jane Stuart, Twin

and that he really hadn't a right to any name now. I settled onto callin' him 'Captain' because he had such a proud, commandin' air.

"He wrote a letter to the woman," Mr. Bobbin went on, "and sent it to a neighbor that would give it to her. I told him an address that would find us, and sure enough, she writ back to him. Said she was glad he'd got away safely, and she was sorry she couldn't tell him anythin' more about his own folks, and she hoped he'd make a good life for himself. Kinder pathetic, warn't it? I told him he must keep it because it would sort of safeguard me in case there was any trouble about him runnin' away. But I guess the old man didn't dare to raise a row."

The tooth-powder man settled back in his chair and took out a voluminous handkerchief. "It breaks me all up to think of the poor little chap lyin' up-stairs there so sick and not knowin' me from the bed-post," he said, blowing his nose like a trumpet, a performance which Kenneth regarded with some envy.

"Here's Dr. Reed, and now we shall know how the poor fellow is," said Uncle Stephen who had been silently listening and thinking.

"He hasn't any contagious disease, Mrs. Stuart, so you may set your mind at rest about the children," the doctor said at once. "There's a good



“ I SHOULD LIKE TO DO SOMETHING FOR THAT BOY ”

The Captain

deal of nerve strain and some brain congestion. The temperature is somewhat lower this morning, but ——” Dr. Reed paused and looked from Mrs. Stuart to Mr. Eliot. “I suppose I could get him into the hospital at Wayland,” he suggested doubtfully, “but that’s ten miles by auto, and I can’t say that it wouldn’t make him worse.”

“Oh, mother, you wouldn’t ——” began Jane tremulously, but no one noticed, for mother was speaking with the smile which always made people want to do what she asked.

“I couldn’t think of having him moved, Dr. Reed,” she said with gentle decision. “I’m considered a pretty good nurse, and with Susan to help me we shall get along famously.”

“We’ll help, too,” promised Jane, proud because they were all looking so admiringly at her mother.

“Of course. It’s always understood that I depend on you all,” Mrs. Stuart answered, putting her arm around her tall daughter.

Uncle Stephen went out to the automobile with Dr. Reed, and when he came back said that the doctor would arrange to send a nurse for the first week anyway. “I should like to do something for that boy,” he went on with his kind smile. “And there will be plenty for all of you to do later on.”

Then lowering his voice so that the children might not hear, he added with some hesitation,

Jane Stuart, Twin

"I—er—believe, Elizabeth, that in writing to your Aunt Caroline I won't—for the present, at least—mention that you are taking care of the poor boy. She has—er—rather strong ideas about some things, and she—er—quite likes to plan for other people—the kindest heart in the world, you know, but you never feel sure how she may be going to take a thing. You—you see my point, I'm sure."

"I quite understand," responded Mrs. Stuart, turning away to speak to the tooth-powder man, who came up to her just then, and hoping that this newly-found uncle wouldn't realize how fully she comprehended what he meant.

"Well, Mis' Stuart, I dunno as I can rightly tell you how I feel 'bout your takin' that boy into your care in such a mothery way. I guess he'll find out what a real mother seems like as soon as he gits so he knows anythin'. Poor little chap! I hate to go off and leave him." Mr. Bobbin's face was quite flushed with the fervor of his gratitude and emotion. "I'm goin' to send him one of those pictur' post-cards once in a while, and I'll leave you an address so's you can write me when he's ready to go on the road again."

He penciled an address on the back of a business card that he extracted from his pocket. "Say, Mis' Stuart," he said bashfully, as he handed it to her, "you couldn't make use of a bottle of that

The Captain

tooth-powder of mine, could you? I'd be proud to give you one."

"I shall be very glad to accept it, Mr. Bobbin."

"Would you really? Well, now, I call that kind of you. I'll lay it on the kitchen table when I go up to take a look at the boy."

Mr. Bobbin started toward the barn to get his wagon, but turned back before Mrs. Stuart had time to go into the house. "I'm goin' to leave somethin' else with you, Mis' Stuart," he said, lowering his voice mysteriously, "and that's a little satchel that belongs to the Captain. He was always very jealous about that satchel. Kep' it locked all the time and wouldn't look into it while I was round. I dunno what he's got there, but likely enough he'll tell you later on."

He stared thoughtfully into vacancy for a moment. "There's one more thing I wish you'd do for me," he added earnestly. "Just as soon as the boy senses enough, I wish you'd tell him that he ain't never again got to show them teeth of his to the public gaze so long as I live. He hated that like pizen, but he would do it because he knew I thought 'twas an awful help to the business. He's the gratefulest little feller."

Mrs. Stuart promised with a warm hand-shake that seemed to gratify the tooth-powder man exceedingly. Then she went indoors to confer with

Jane Stuart, Twin

Miss Trot, and gaze with all her mother-heart in her eyes at the distressed boyish face, so white even against the whiteness of the pillow.

The nurse arrived, a trim, efficient person, who piloted the poor lad through troubled days and nights when it seemed as though he could not possibly recover.

Then one morning the doctor came down-stairs with a face so full of gladness that every one was sure of it before he spoke.

"He's better, isn't he?" asked David, springing forward impulsively to meet him.

The doctor's hand found the boy's in a sudden, close grasp. "He's going to get well, son; he's going to get well," he answered with a thrill in his voice which stirred them all.

"I could tell that you are Polly's father," remarked Jane, feeling that something must be said at this critical moment. "Your eyes shine just as hers do when she's excited, and I almost believe you'd like to jump up and down the way she does."

"I should do it if I really wanted to, Miss Impertinence. I tell you, little girl, we've been fighting, and I was afraid we were going to lose, and we've won out. That's enough to make a man's eyes shine, isn't it?"

Jane agreed warmly. "How soon may Davy

The Captain

and I amuse him and read to him?" she asked. "They haven't let me help at all yet."

"Very soon, I hope. This morning he is following your mother with his big black eyes. He doesn't want her out of his sight a moment. But there'll be plenty for you and David to do later on."

In spite of the doctor's cheerful prophecy Jane was not called upon to act as entertainer for so long a time that her feelings were really hurt. The nurse left, and the boy, moved by this time into the airy guest-chamber, made rapid strides toward health. He was devoted to Mrs. Stuart, longed for David when he was out of sight and welcomed the visits of Judy and Kenneth. Uncle Stephen, too, was a frequent caller, and a warm friendship was established between him and Captain as they called him for want of a better name. But at the sound of Jane's laughing voice the boy shrank involuntarily, and when she entered the room he turned his head away and had nothing to say.

Every one wondered at it, Jane most of all. She was so used to being liked that she couldn't understand this boy's ungracious attitude toward her. She had planned to be so helpful that it hurt her pride to be thwarted in this way, and, though she tried to consider it only the queer fancy of a sick person, the sting remained!

Jane Stuart, Twin

At last one afternoon, coming home from lunching with five or six of the other girls at Carol's, she found the boy in a steamer-chair on the piazza, quite alone for the moment, and looking helplessly at Rags, who had dragged away the magazine he was reading. He started to get out of the chair, but the dog only frisked farther away, barking a joyous invitation for him to follow.

"Oh, wait, I'll get it for you," called Jane, skimming up on the piazza and nabbing Rags from the rear before he had time to escape. Just for a second she forgot that her help wouldn't be welcome, and then she suddenly resolved to pretend that it was, and that he would like to see her as much as he would David.

"That Rags will be the end of me yet," she said, handing him the magazine and dropping down on the piazza rail near him. "Did you ever hear how he chewed up my best white shoes about two weeks after we came here?" And then, taking it for granted that he would want to hear, Jane was off on a ludicrous description of the dog's destructive prank, her own feelings and Rob's subsequent overwhelming success in removing a cork.

She was folding and refolding her handkerchief as she talked, and trying to keep her eyes from the thin, dark face lying back against the cushions. To her boundless delight an unmistakable chuckle

The Captain

greeted the end of her story, and she looked up quickly to see a smile which banished the sorrow from the dark eyes, and lighted the boyish face into real beauty.

"I'd have given anything to see that," he said so naturally that Jane felt the joy of a conqueror rise high in her heart.

"Perhaps you'd like to hear how Rob and I first met," she asked demurely, and launched at once into the story of the speckled hen, fearing that if she waited a moment the charm would be broken. Now she wasn't afraid to glance at him from time to time, and her quick eye took in the fact that when her clear joyous laughter rang out, he winced, and shrank farther back into the cushions as if the sound hurt him.

Jane kept on with her gay chatter, but somewhere in her mind she was puzzling over this. Why should he hate to hear her laugh? And then like a flash the answer came to her, and she was on the platform at the station again with mother and David. She could see again the resentful glance of the boy who had jostled her in passing, and hear David saying, "He probably thinks you were laughing at him."

She was so sure that she had found the right explanation that with her usual impetuosity she couldn't wait another moment. She wished

Jane Stuart, Twin

wildly that she could remember what she had laughed about, and then, to her intense relief, that came back too.

"I know now," she said, smiling her friendliest smile and plunging into the middle of things at once. "You thought I was laughing at you, didn't you, when we were both on the station platform, and when you heard it again you just hated the sound of it.

"But it was really Davy, you see, and not you at all. Something had made mother say that she wanted to hug us both hard, and Spinksy was so afraid that she was going to do it right there on the platform that his face nearly killed me." Jane laughed gleefully at the recollection, but this time the boy only gazed at her with a smile of relief, and the puzzled frown was gone.

"I'm so glad that's all settled," she went on in a matter-of-fact way, "for I just have to laugh often, and it would be hard on both of us if you had to scowl and look hurt every time."

"That must have been one of the last things I knew much about," confessed the boy with a little shudder. "I couldn't tell why it made me feel so to see you and hear you laugh. It bothered me like everything, because you've all been so good to me."

"And you won't feel so any more, will you?" Jane picked up the magazine which had slipped

The Captain

to the floor, and wanted to shake up the cushion, but didn't dare. "Oh, I hope I haven't hurt you talking so much," she said penitently. "I thought it would be such fun to surprise them by being good friends with you, but Susan will shoo me away if I've made you tired."

The boy's somber eyes held a gleam of fun, which lightened Jane's anxiety. "Girls can't help talking, can they? Susan and Judy can't, and now you—but anyway you haven't tired me, and—and I'm sorry I was such a donkey before."

"Well, you've missed opportunities, of course, that you'll never have again." Jane drew down her face solemnly, but her eyes would laugh. "That's what they're always telling me," she sighed, "but—— Oh, there's David! Watch his face!"

After all it was the face of the boy in the chair that Jane gazed at, for it lightened and brightened and became so full of affection that it was quite wonderful to see.

"That's just the way," Jane said suddenly; "I'm nowhere when Spinksy is around. You just wait. You may learn to appreciate me yet."

David's surprise, which he politely tried to conceal, and his evident joy at finding his twin chatting so comfortably with the invalid amused both the conspirators.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Did I leave you too long, Captain?" he inquired solicitously. "We'll go in now if you say so. Rob is coming over to look at my new stamps."

Jane watched the two boys as they walked along the piazza, the other boy's hand on David's shoulder. Larry, Uncle Stephen's dog, a member of their family while his master was away, rose from his nap by the front door and laid his great head against David, whom he loved next after his master.

"Well, you may both think you like him better than I do," Jane said defiantly. "But you don't. He's my twin."

Two days later, coming home from doing an errand with mother, Jane saw an automobile in front of the house, and a gentleman getting out. She realized in a moment that it was Uncle Stephen, and knew, with a queer little flutter, that the lady with him must be Aunt Caroline. Somehow she had fancied that her great-aunt's first coming would be heralded by trumpets and drums, and that the whole family would be drawn up in line to receive her. And now there wasn't a soul in sight, and she had left her mother to make a call in another part of the town.

She hurried along as fast as she could, and Uncle Stephen discovered her as she was coming up the front walk.

The Captain

"Caroline, my dear, here's Jane," he said with a warm welcome in his smile, and his companion, turning, put out both her hands.

"Dear me, what a tall girl my little great-niece is. Kiss your Aunt Caroline, Janey, and tell her you're glad to see her."

Jane's heart went out at once to this sparkling little lady, whose rosy cheeks were framed in soft, white hair, and whose dark eyes gazed at her so approvingly.

"We've just come to the hotel at Belhaven Beach," explained her aunt, "and I told Stephen that I must come right over here to-day. He knows you all so well that he forgets I'm such a stranger to you. Why, it's only about five minutes ago that he remembered to tell me what a burden your poor dear mother has had on her shoulders for the last few weeks. Isn't that boy almost well enough to go off with the Dobbin—Robbin—what was it, Stephen?—man again?"

"You mean Mr. Bobbin," Jane laughed joyously. "He's the kindest-hearted man you ever saw. He's been sending the Captain picture postals and oranges and stamps ever since he left here. And we don't mean to let the Captain go away, Aunt Caroline. Some time, when he gets very strong and well, he's going to tell mother everything he knows about himself, and then we're

Jane Stuart, Twin

going to adopt him, and have him choose a name out of our favorites. Won't that be fine? "

"Humph! And pray, who is to furnish ——"

Something about Jane's radiant face modified the sharpness of Aunt Caroline's tone, and put an end to the half-completed sentence. Uncle Stephen, who had been silently interviewing Larry, breathed a sigh of relief.

"Oh, excuse me," Jane said, remembering all at once the duties of hospitality. "Won't you please come in? It's funny to politely invite you into your own house, isn't it? I'm so sorry mother is away, but perhaps she'll come before you go. I'll call David and try to find the other children."

"I'll hunt up the children, Janey, if you'll take care of your aunt," interposed Uncle Stephen quietly.

Aunt Caroline wanted to go all over the house, and Jane accompanied her, quaking a little under the scrutiny of the keen eyes, but proudly sure that mother's housekeeping would bear any test. She was glad when they were safely out of the kitchen, where Miss Trot, not quite realizing the identity of the visitor, was disposed to resent the searching questions as to her parents and home.

A murmur of boyish voices in David's room made Aunt Caroline pause and turn away. "I don't know what to say to boys," she explained in

The Captain

answer to Jane's puzzled gaze, "but I just love girls, and you're a darling if ever there was one."

They had reached Jane's room by this time, and Aunt Caroline's gaze fell at once on the portrait of her little sister. "I always wondered if I was doing right in naming you for her," she murmured, turning away from the picture to look critically at her niece, "and now I'm so glad."

"Jane, I wish I'd brought you the little blue gown I was looking at the other day," she went on surprisingly. "It would be so becoming to you. I'm always looking at girls' dresses and wishing I had a girl to buy them for."

Jane smiled and wondered just what she ought to say in answer to this. She felt that she could stand being the possessor of a blue gown, but she didn't like to mention it.

Just then, to her joy, mother came into the room, and she was glad to slip into the background and watch Aunt Caroline and try to settle her own feelings in regard to her. She had just made up her mind that this new aunt was pretty and stylish and didn't seem at all old in spite of the white hair, when the sound of her own name made her give instant attention to the conversation.

"I haven't seen the other children yet," Aunt Caroline was saying, "but I do envy you your Jane." She put out her arms as she spoke, and

Jane Stuart, Twin

Jane, not very demonstrative with any one except mother, went to the embrace shyly.

“Darling!” murmured her aunt, releasing her at last. “You must lend her to me every day while I’m at the beach, Elizabeth. If my little Caroline had lived she would have been not much older. You’ve heard about my grandchild, haven’t you, Jane?”

“Yes, Aunt Caroline.” There was so much sorrow in the little lady’s voice that Jane’s longing to give her instant joy conquered her discretion. “I know a girl who’s adopted, and lots of things about her fit, and ——” she began softly, but stopped because her mother was looking at her in such a queer, comprehending way.

“Do you remember, Aunt Caroline,” mother said hastily, flashing a smile at Jane, “how you used to scold me for getting up such romances about people? Well, the minute I heard that Carol Heath was an adopted child, and that the Heaths came from the Pacific Coast, I began to turn her into a granddaughter for you. She looks like some picture I’ve seen of you, too.”

“How your imagination used to run on.” Aunt Caroline’s tone held distinct disapproval, Jane thought. “I suppose you know that Carol is the child of Mr. Heath’s sister?”

“Hearing that was what put an end to my air-

The Captain

castle. Even my imagination can't get beyond a hard fact like that," answered Mrs. Stuart, giving her daughter a quick glance. "But we do all wish that you had your girl."

Aunt Caroline's dark eyes, softened by sudden tears, turned appealingly to Jane, who was looking startled and a little pale. "It was dreadful not to be absolutely sure about anything," she said piteously. "And I always wanted a little girl named for me. You must be very good to me, little great-niece, now I've found you."

Half an hour later, Jane, having watched the automobile out of sight, sat down in the hammock beside her mother.

"Why did you stop me and tell it yourself, mumsey?" she asked.

"Oh, Janey, I knew in a minute just what your mind had been doing. And Aunt Caroline hasn't very much sympathy with imaginative people. If I had only guessed that you had heard about Carol ——"

"I couldn't tell any one because I had promised, but I wanted to tell you a dozen times," interrupted Jane, nestling against mother's shoulder. "After this I think I shall never promise to keep things from you. It's too wearing on my constitution."

"Well, there's another perfectly good air-castle

Jane Stuart, Twin

gone to smash," she went on after a moment's silence. "I'm not going to build any more. At least, not any more about 'little Caroline.' I don't see, though, why Carol was so mysterious."

Jane looked up at her mother with a puzzled frown, and then, suddenly, a little smile danced in her eyes. "It was lots more interesting to me to think it was a real secret, and probably Carol knew it would be," she murmured understandingly.

"How do you like being loved so much right spang off, 'darling Jane'?" queried Kenneth, sauntering up to the hammock. "Aunt Caroline doesn't care much for boys, I guess, but Uncle Stephen likes us all."

"I think she's awfully interesting and fascinating." Jane sprang loyally to the defense, though up to this moment she had not been quite certain just what her feeling was. "And I heard her tell Uncle Stephen that Captain has the most beautiful eyes she has ever seen. So you see she can appreciate a boy's good points if he has any."

"Well, give me—step-great-uncles—by marriage," affirmed Kenneth, feeling for his words carefully as he brought out the relationship. "They're nice to you from the beginning, and right along, instead of exploding all at once."

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLACK BAG

THE borrowing of Jane began immediately, and, as Aunt Caroline had suggested, became an everyday affair. She lunched at the hotel and dined there. The automobile was sent for her in the morning, and took her swiftly home in the cool of the early evening. She had riding lessons, and learned so readily that she was soon able to ride on the beach with Uncle Stephen. Dainty gowns were waiting for her to try on, and life became a succession of surprises.

Jane had scarcely time to notice that mother and David looked after her a little wistfully when she was whirled away in the morning, and that, though mother praised the pretty dresses, and admired Aunt Caroline's generous gifts, she studied her radiant daughter with puzzled eyes in the brief glimpses allowed her.

It did penetrate Jane's consciousness, however, that David was growing very silent, glum, she called it, and she urged him to go over to the hotel with her and get acquainted with the young people there, but he refused.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"These boys and girls are good enough for me," he said almost crossly. "I'll be glad when you get over all this razzle-dazzle and come back to being my twin again."

"Why, I never stopped being your twin, Spinksy." Jane looked at him with hurt, bewildered eyes. "Aunt Caroline almost weeps if I suggest staying at home, or when Uncle Stephen tells her she ought not to borrow me so much. And, of course, I'm having a perfectly elegant time."

"Well, it may be fun for you, but ——" David stopped abruptly and strode into the house because the automobile, with Aunt Caroline smiling and waving at Jane, was just approaching.

The climax came on the day of Rob Randall's party. Jane had been permitted to stay at home that day, but Aunt Caroline came over soon after lunch to see that her child, as she fondly called her, was arrayed with due care in one of the pretty new dresses she had given her.

It was to be an afternoon out-of-door party, and Jane came down at three o'clock to find Carol waiting to walk along with her and David. The latter, not really happy over the prospect of a party, was bracing up to it like a martyr, and spending his last minutes on the piazza with the Captain, who was not yet able to join in the good

The Black Bag

times. Mother was out there, too, sitting near the steamer-chair and looking a little pale, and rather worried, David thought.

"There, isn't that just perfect?" demanded Aunt Caroline, sweeping Jane out on the piazza before them all, and turning her around like a wax figure.

Jane smiled a little consciously. She hadn't yet got used to being treated like a doll, and admired so much, and it made her feel foolish when other people were around.

"It's perfectly lovely," responded Carol, admiring the new dress so warmly that it wasn't really necessary for any one else to speak.

"If there's anything I love," said Aunt Caroline, "it's putting a pretty dress on a pretty girl and sending her off to a party. Young people ought to enjoy themselves without any care or responsibility; don't you agree with me, Elizabeth?"

"Not entirely, Aunt Caroline." Mother's voice was just as pleasant as usual, but her daughter could not shake off the impression that something about her was different.

"Well, I shall have to stop being a gay butterfly as soon as my fairy godmother goes away," said Jane with a sigh which was more a tribute to Aunt Caroline than an expression of her deepest feelings. She saw David look up at her quickly, with an

Jane Stuart, Twin

anxious frown on his smooth, boyish face, and she wanted to say something to set herself right in his eyes. Before she could speak, however, Aunt Caroline was making a request which fairly took her breath away.

"Oh, Elizabeth, why do I have to give her up?" she cried pleadingly. "Why won't you let me have her for a year—I won't say any longer time than that—but for a year?"

"Janey, I'll take you abroad," she was looking straight into the girl's eyes now with her most compelling expression. "You shall travel and have drawing-lessons, and an allowance that you may use just as you please——"

"Drawing-lessons!" breathed Jane, hardly knowing what she was saying. "And Europe! Oh, mother!"

"What do you say, Elizabeth?" demanded Aunt Caroline impatiently. "Do be generous and let me have her for one year. You have three other children, you know."

"I know I have," said mother, looking so bewildered at this sudden onslaught that David instinctively came round behind her chair and put his hand on her shoulder. "I—I can't decide an important question like this all in a moment, Aunt Caroline. I'm not even sure that Jane herself would wish to leave——"

The Black Bag

"Oh, if that's all—why, just look at the child." Mrs. Eliot disposed of the objection as though it were a mere nothing, and truly, Jane's flushed face and eager eyes did seem sufficient proof of her desire.

"You're going to let me have her, I know," persisted Aunt Caroline with the wilful pertinacity of a child. Then, because she was used to sweeping everything before her, she suddenly assumed that the question was settled, and cried joyously, "It's all right, little grandniece, I'm to have you for a whole year. And now run along to your party, and let me talk to mother about it."

"Whew," said Carol softly as they went down the front walk. "That's settling things in a hurry, isn't it?" But no one answered her, for Jane, whose eyes were gazing into the far distance, seemed dazed, and David, with hands plunged deep in his pockets and eyes on the ground, had evidently not heard the remark.

In the steamer-chair on the piazza, the Captain lay with closed eyes, and listened uneasily while Mrs. Eliot described to Mrs. Stuart the advantages Jane would have if this latest plan were carried out. He had meant to go into the house when David went away, but Mrs. Stuart's hand had been laid on his arm, and he had settled back among the cushions again, feeling that if she wanted him he must stay. After the first moment, however,

Jane Stuart, Twin

he turned his face away because he could not bear to see the increasing pain in her soft, brown eyes.

The Captain tried not to listen, but as Mrs. Eliot had no desire for any secrecy in regard to her plans he could not avoid hearing. The facts in the case from her point of view were laid down with an emphasis which made him shrink and shiver a little. Mrs. Stuart could not afford to give her daughter the advantages so brilliant a girl should have, and she ought to realize that and not stand in the child's way. Jane had a positive genius for languages, according to her great-aunt, and there was no method of study so good as a sojourn in the countries where they were spoken. The child really was artistic and ought to have a career, and certainly no one else could afford to give her the preparation for it.

Then there was the advantage of her Uncle Stephen's influence. "Stephen is a wonderful man with young people," Aunt Caroline said with a note of pride in her voice, and the boy in the steamer-chair agreed with her unreservedly. He had learned to love Mr. Eliot just as all the others did.

"But, Aunt Caroline, what you are planning for Jane would take years to accomplish," faltered Mrs. Stuart. "I can't see ——"

"Let it take years." Aunt Caroline was more

The Black Bag

and more in love with her expanding idea of Jane's future. "She's worth it, and I shall perfectly adore having a girl to manage and look out for. Why, Elizabeth, if you'll only agree to this I'll provide for her as long as I live and make her my heiress when I die. If you're a true mother, and I certainly think you are, you really can't ask anything better than to feel that your daughter won't have to struggle for a living as so many girls must. And think what she'll be able to do for the others."

The Captain opened his eyes involuntarily, and stretched one hand out on the arm of his chair toward Mrs. Stuart. No one noticing him, he drew it back, a little embarrassed, and caught his breath sharply as he realized how white and drawn David's mother looked.

"Well, I'm going to take it for granted that you'll come around to my point of view," said Aunt Caroline, suddenly jumping up from her chair, and assuming as usual that what she wanted would be brought to pass. "It's easy enough to see how Jane feels. The darling! She happened to tell me one day how much she wanted drawing-lessons, but she wouldn't mention it to you because just now you can't afford it. Wasn't that sweet of her? And she's perfectly wild to travel."

Jane Stuart, Twin

Her automobile came up to the front of the house as the excited little lady finished speaking, and she went into the hall for her parasol.

"Good-bye, Elizabeth," she said a moment later, coming back to kiss her niece affectionately. "Why don't you go in and have a nice nap? You look tired to death. I'm afraid you've had too much care on your shoulders lately." This last was said in a subdued voice, and with a significant nod toward the boy in the chair, apparently sleeping now. "Good-bye again. I'll send for Jane in the morning."

The moment she was out of hearing the Captain's eyes opened. "Do you think you have had too much care, David's little mother?" he asked anxiously, stretching out his thin hand to her. "Have I tired you?"

"No, indeed, dear boy. It has been good for us all to have you here. And I'm not really tired. Mothers have their worriments, as Susan Trot says. They want their children to have the very best life can give, and it's hard to balance things properly, and to know what is best."

"If you should ask me what is best for girls and boys I should say 'mothers,' and I know," the Captain said with calm assurance, patting her soft hand.

"You and David will spoil me between you,"

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said Mrs. Stuart with a faint smile. "And the other children are just as bad. Jane—well, Jane is a little dazzled now, but she loves her mother just the same." She looked away for a moment, and then turned back to the Captain with her heartening smile.

"Dear boy, when are we going to have our little talk together? The doctor thinks you are well enough now, and perhaps if you tell me all you can about yourself we can help you to find your family or friends."

The boy's face changed unconsciously. "Let me wait a little longer," he pleaded. "I started to go to your room yesterday with my little bag, but I couldn't. It makes me shake so even to think about those times."

He was trembling now, and the soft, dark eyes were eloquent in their distress.

"Wait just as long as you wish," answered Mrs. Stuart, her voice full of the mother-comfort which soothed him inexpressibly. "Shall you be lonesome if I go off and leave you? One of the children, or some one, will be here soon, I'm sure."

"Not a bit. I've got 'David Copperfield' here and I'll read till the other David comes. It's a great book," he ended enthusiastically, quite as if no one had ever discovered it before.

Jane Stuart, Twin

A half-hour later Judy drifted out from the house carrying an old photograph album, her eyes crinkling with laughter.

"Want to see a picture of my mother when she was a little bit of a girl?" she invited, and without waiting for permission obscured David Copperfield with the album.

"Wasn't she the dearest, funniest thing, and doesn't she look scared to death? Wait a minute and I'll show you one of Aunt Caroline. Let's begin at the first page, and I'll tell you everything I can."

It was not an absorbing recital, and the boy's mind and eyes wandered. "Here's a picture of Aunt Caroline's little sister, the one our Jane was named for," explained Judy, recalling him to the subject in hand a little severely. "Mother says Aunt Caroline was perfectly heart-broken when she died, and that's probably one reason why she loves Jane so much. I should think our Jane would get awfully tired of being told how pretty she is and how much Aunt Caroline loves her, shouldn't you?" she ended scornfully.

"Nobody ever tried it on me, so I don't know," said the Captain with a queer laugh. "I think I could stand it, though."

"Well—p'raps I could, too." Judy was gazing thoughtfully into space.

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“Now, here is Aunt Caroline’s son who died,” she went on, turning the next page with a flourish. “And his wife died, too, and Aunt Caroline never could find their dear little baby. Some day when Jane and David have grown up they’re going—— Why, Captain, what’s the matter? Did anything hurt you?”

“No,” said the boy, whose gaze was riveted on the photograph Judy had pointed out. “No, nothing hurt me. Tell me again about it.” And then before she could answer, he repeated her words slowly, “He died, and his wife died, and Aunt Caroline never could find their dear little baby.”

“Yes,” said Judy, frightened by his pale face and the look in his eyes. “That’s what mother told me. I think I’d better call mother.”

“No, don’t call any one.” The boy was pulling himself out of the low chair as he spoke. “I’m going up-stairs. And, please, Judy, don’t tell any one that I didn’t feel well. I shall be all right—in a little while. Promise, Judy.”

“‘Stuart obliges,’” answered Judy firmly. “I couldn’t break my word after that. Wouldn’t you like to have me put cold water on your head or get you a glass of lemonade?”

“No, thanks,” the Captain called back, and she could hear him mounting the stairs.

Jane Stuart, Twin

Once in his room he closed the door softly and turned the key. Then he took out of the closet the small black bag which Mr. Bobbin had left with Mrs. Stuart when the boy was first taken ill. His hands shook so that he could hardly unfasten it with the little key which he took from his pocket. This bag had been given him by the woman who had brought him up, and she had told him that, just as it was, it had been put into her hands by his mother.

The bag snapped open at last and he drew out two or three things, among them the one for which he was particularly looking. He gazed at it with eyes in which wonder, perplexity and a certain proud satisfaction were strangely mingled, then laid it back softly, as though it were alive and very precious to him. Then he looked at the others, and put them back, and locked the bag.

For a long time the boy sat motionless by the open window with the summer breeze cooling his hot forehead and ruffling his dark hair. For a while he could hardly separate the thoughts that surged through his mind. The first that came with any clearness was the memory of certain words Mrs. Eliot had spoken. Something about how Jane should be provided for all her life, and of how much she could do for her family. He remembered how Jane's eyes had looked when

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Europe was mentioned. There was no sacrifice too great for him to make for this family, he told himself stoutly. He was glad to have the chance—and then he caught his breath sharply, and wished with all his heart that he could talk it over with some one. That was out of the question, of course—he ran over the different members of the family in his mind—unless, perhaps, Mr. Chope.

He put the bag carefully back in the closet, and, on his way to the barn, stopped to speak to Miss Trot, who was mixing gingerbread for supper.

“Susan,” he said hesitatingly, “does it cost a great deal to have a nurse and a doctor?”

“Land, yes. Doctors, of course; and those trained nurses are the expensivest things you can have. I dare say they do save you something in the end, though, and they’re awful nice. I’ve always thought I’d like to have one myself if I was feelin’ well enough so’s I could wait on her and enjoy it.” Miss Trot paused in her work and gazed out of the window with thoughtful eyes. “I’ve got a kind of a notion that I should like to be one,” she added, looking at the boy for the first time.

The sight of his pale face made her drop her spoon with a clatter. “For mercy’s sake, what are you talking about nurses and doctors for?”

Jane Stuart, Twin

You ain't got a feelin' that you're goin' to be sick again, have you? You go right up-stairs and lie down, and I'll call Mis' Stuart."

"I'm all right, Susan. I'm going out to the barn to see Mr. Chope." The boy laughed, a little shakily, hoping to reassure her.

Kenneth and Mr. Chope were sitting in the doorway of the barn and enjoying together the never-ending charm of the mythological tales in which their souls delighted.

"There ain't no such heroes to-day," Mr. Chope was saying in answer to some remark of Kenneth's. "Nowadays ——" and then they both looked up and saw the Captain coming toward them, and both sprang to give him a chair.

"I can't stop to sit down," he said, trying to appear very offhand and natural. "I just wanted to ask Mr. Chope ——" and then he stopped and wondered what it was that he had expected to find out from Mr. Chope.

"Well, I'm here and waitin'," encouraged the old man mildly. "There are a few things I don't know, of course, but not many." He was watching the lad's face with his keen old eyes.

"Were you here when Ken's mother was a little girl?" the boy stopped to moisten his dry lips, "and did you—did you ever know Mrs. Eliot's son?"

"Well, I guess I did. Mis' Eliot was a little

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young widder by the name of Lee when I first come here, and Donald Lee was her boy. He was always kitin' round the barn and garden some-thin' like Kenneth here. Clever little chap."

"I—I got interested because I heard Judy talking about him," answered the Captain, feeling that he must explain his curiosity. "I believe I'll go into the house now."

"Heard from your friend Mr. Bobbin lately?" Mr. Chope inquired, cudgeling his brain for reasons for the lad's peculiar behavior.

"Why no, I haven't." The Captain's face brightened unaccountably, and he turned and shook Mr. Chope's hard old hand. "That's just what I needed—to have somebody remind me of him. I'll go in and write to him—now."

All the way from the barn to his room the boy's mind kept up the unending whirl of thought.

"I've cost them enough already, and I'll get Mr. Bobbin to help me find something to do as soon as he can," he was thinking. "Then Jane and the others will be taken care of. A boy can work, of course, and make his own way."

He lifted his head, and the slender boyish figure grew erect. "I shall never tell, of course," he said with proud determination. "But what does it matter—so long as I am sure?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE WINNER

IN the meantime, Jane, at the party, was trying to smooth out the tangles of her mind, and have as good a time as she always did when girls and boys were plenty. When she arrived she had been greeted with reproaches on account of her lengthy desertion of the Belhaven young people, and besieged with questions as to when she should return to them. With wonderful prospects opening out before her it was difficult to answer, and, possessed by a newly-acquired sensitiveness, Jane fancied that the girls looked at her with different eyes and thought her changed.

Then Carol, partly from mischief, and partly because she liked to be the first to tell interesting news, confided to Serena the plans which Mrs. Eliot was making for her grandniece.

"Oh, Jane," said Serena, five minutes later, flying up to a group of which Jane was the center, "isn't it perfectly fine? Carol has just told me, and I'm so sorry."

"Don't be so mixed in your statements, Serena.

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"You're not a perfect lady," laughed Polly. "What is this wonderful thing about Jane?"

"Why she—you don't mind if I tell, do you, Jane? Probably Carol has let it out to nearly every one by this time. Why, Jane is going abroad for years, and going to be an artist, and ——"

"Nonsense," said Jane sharply. "Aunt Caroline asked mother if I might stay with her for a year, and said she'd take me abroad and let me have drawing-lessons. That's all. And nothing's decided, anyway."

"All!" echoed Peggy Curtis, who had strolled up to the group in time to hear the last remark. "Well, if someone was going to take me abroad ——" words failed her in which to express her appreciation of such a prospect, and she stopped abruptly.

"Jane, I'm really dreadfully disappointed," Molly Oliver said, putting both hands on Jane's shoulders and gazing at her with regret in her eyes. "I thought you would help us out so much in all the fun and athletics next winter. I don't know what we shall do without you."

"But I'm not the least bit sure that I'm going, Mollyolly," protested Jane, trying to laugh, but feeling irritated because they would take things so for granted. "My mother hasn't said that I may go, and I don't know ——"

"If your mother thinks it's going to be an ad-

Jane Stuart, Twin

vantage to you," interrupted Esther Strong in her slow, shy way, "she's sure to let you go. Mothers are like that."

"It's certainly nice to have a wealthy aunt." It was Rita Mayo who said this. "I advise you to be careful, Jane, how you refuse to do anything she wants you to do."

Jane turned away from the group sharply. This point of view hadn't occurred to her before, and she disliked Rita for forcing it upon her. Somehow to have them all so sure made her feel as if the plan were almost a certainty. And, because every one knew about it, it seemed as though she were irrevocably bound to something which perhaps she might not want to do. She began to have a little choking feeling in her throat, and instinctively she looked around for David, but he was chatting with another boy and, to all appearances, had forgotten that his twin existed.

"Let's not talk about me any more, girls," she begged, turning back to the group. "When I get hold of that bad Carol Heath, I shall punish her for telling my plans before they are decided." She tried to speak just as she always did, but it was an effort, and she was glad to be still and listen to what Rob was saying.

It was to be a progressive game party, he announced. There was a chance for both tennis and

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croquet on the big lawn back of the house. A target had been set up on one side, and they would find bows and arrows waiting for them there. Over in the southeast corner there were battledores and shuttlecocks, and, not far from the same place, ringtoss and some other games. There would be score-keepers, and the winner of the greatest number of points would get a prize. A victory at tennis would count a certain number of points, croquet a certain other number. The latter game would be one of the contests for the girls, since they were not dressed for tennis.

"I won't stop to explain to you all about the score," ended Rob, "because Molly Oliver, who helped me plan this, decided that we'd have all boys for score-keepers. So you'll know, of course, that everything will be absolutely correct."

There was a chorus of protesting groans from the girls, out of the midst of which Mollyolly's voice rose defiantly.

"I didn't say it for that reason at all, girls. It was just because it's easier for boys to carry around paper and pencils."

"Well, anyway, we'll begin now," chuckled Rob, quite satisfied with the success of his remark. "Here's good luck to you all."

"This is where I shall shine," announced Rita complacently. They were all walking toward the

Jane Stuart, Twin

archery side of the lawn where the games were to begin, and she had hooked her arm into Jane's, quite oblivious of the latter's dislike for her society. "It's funny," she continued confidentially, "I'm not so awfully good in playing games at school, but when we play for prizes I certainly do have the most wonderful luck."

"You're too lazy to do your best unless there is a prize," volunteered Polly, the plain-spoken, who had overheard what Rita said and longed to get even with her.

To her disgust this little slap was taken as a tribute, and Rita only laughed. "Do you know, they're really all jealous of me," she said, turning to Jane, whose unresponsiveness did not affect her in the least.

Polly walked off with a discouraged shrug. "It wouldn't be the least bit of use to try to stick pins into a—a hippopotamus, would it?" she remarked confidentially to Marian Chester, whom she almost ran over in her absorption.

"Oh, Polly, you are so funny," gurgled Marian, who could always be depended upon to try to appreciate anything that her friends might say. "But what"—her joyous face assumed a blank expression—"just what does it mean?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing," Polly answered crossly. "It's just my naturally bad

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temper working out. Only, I warn you, keep between me and Rita Mayo for the rest of the afternoon, if you love me."

"All right, I will. I can stand you both," said Marian with unexpected brilliancy, and then they both laughed and walked over to the corner where battledore and shuttlecock were already in progress.

Jane played games well always, but to-day she went at them with that reckless indifference as to results which sometimes makes for success. All the time that hand and eye and responsive body were occupied in keeping the shuttlecock afloat, her mind was revolving over and over Aunt Caroline's astonishing proposition. When, finally, she made a misstep, and the thing of cork and feathers floated to the ground, she came out of her absorption to find that she had made a very high score, and that Ned Holt, the score-keeper for this game, was applauding her.

"Keep it up, Jane, keep it up," he said softly. "Your score, I mean, not the shuttlecock. If you will only beat ——" his voice stopped suddenly as Rita Mayo hurried up to them.

"Come on, Neddy, count for me," she said airily. "I've just got the biggest score that's been made at ringtoss."

Jane, walking off, caught a significant glance

Jane Stuart, Twin

from Ned and felt a sudden wish to win. It would be a satisfaction, even if she were not to be there next winter, to do something brilliant now, so that they would remember her, and Ned, at least, seemed to want her to beat Rita.

Even with the desire for victory strongly aroused, it was some time before she could succeed in putting more than half her mind into her playing, but, in spite of that, success seemed to follow her most absent-minded efforts.

“Jane, you’re a corker at this sort of thing, aren’t you?” Rob said, coming up after one of her fine scores with a face full of enthusiasm. “I can’t get David going at all. What’s the matter with him this afternoon? Just go in and win, will you? I suppose as it’s my party I ought to cheer equally for every one, but—somehow—well, anyway, Lady Jane, if you’ll win I’ll let you chase my hens all day some time.” He ran off without noticing that the time-worn joke didn’t elicit its usual smile.

Jane looked around again for David, but couldn’t find him for a moment. Then one of the score-keepers called her to go on with the good work, and just at that second she saw her twin standing alone with a very serious expression on his boyish face.

“Oh, Jane, dearest,” said Carol, flying up to

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her a little later, "do you love me at all? If you do please beat that conceited creature who has managed to worm out from the score-keepers that her score is just a little higher than yours. You two are to play croquet together to decide it. If you get the ten points they allow for that, you'll make up the difference between you and be something ahead. Oh, Lady Jane, do your prettiest!"

"I don't love you the least little bit," answered Jane sulkily. "Why did you tell every one what Aunt Caroline said? I haven't been able to put my mind on the games at all, and ——"

"For goodness' sake, if this is the way you play when your mind isn't on it, don't put it on," interrupted Carol in mock alarm. Then a caressing arm went suddenly around Jane's waist, and penitent eyes looked into hers. "Truly, I'm sorry, Lady Jane," the gay voice said softly. "I ought to have known better. I'm afraid I'm not very dependable. But do beat Rita even if I am a wretch."

Twenty minutes later Rita had two wickets and the stake to make, while Jane was for the center wicket on the home run, and it was her turn. Rita was out of position, and her opponent in so poor a one, that it seemed out of the question for her to make the wicket.

Jane Stuart, Twin

Jane, considering the question with her whole mind at this crisis, decided that she would not try to put her ball through, but would aim for a position against the wire which would give her a chance at two wickets the next time. She made her shot deliberately, but before any one could see just where it landed there was a wild shriek from the other side of the lawn, and every one ran over there to see what had happened to Marian Chester, who had fallen flat. Jane went, too, among the first, but she had taken in the fact that her ball was squarely against the wire, though not in the way she meant, and that it would take two shots to make the wicket.

“I—I had one foot on a toad,” gasped Marian, half laughing, half crying. “I didn’t know it—and all of—of a sudden—something soft wriggled under—under my shoe. Ugh!”

“Oh, Marian, you’re such a baby,” said Peggy Curtis, surveying her fallen friend with critical disgust. “Why didn’t you get off and not say anything about it?”

“I did! I did! You don’t suppose I’m on him now, do you?” wailed Marian. “But I kept thinking about how the poor thing must have felt before he made up his mind to wriggle, and before I knew it the scream came right out, and I turned my ankle trying to get away from the place.”

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Every one shouted with laughter over this pathetic avowal, Marian was set upon her feet, and the croquet contest was renewed.

"Hurry, Jane," said Molly Oliver. "Rita has taken her turn to get in position and now you have a perfectly elegant chance."

"Grand, isn't it?" answered Jane with good-natured sarcasm, strolling toward her ball as she spoke. She had lingered a little hoping that David would come up and speak to her, but he had disappeared behind a group of boys.

"Well, I don't know what you want better than that," said Rita, who had come back to watch Jane's play. "If I had it I should think it was good for two wickets at least."

Jane, having stopped to listen to another urgent appeal from Carol, glanced at her ball and could hardly believe her eyes. When she had looked before it was hopelessly against the outside of the wire; now it had rolled or been pushed until it lay in perfect position.

"Why—why, some one must have moved it," she stammered, wondering at the same time if she could have been mistaken when she saw it before Marian shrieked.

"Well, which of us do you accuse?" Rita asked, with the sharp laugh which never failed to irritate Jane. "If that position isn't good enough for you

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why don't you pick it up and place it where you like?"

"Perhaps I didn't see it right before," Jane said, trying hard to keep her temper, and feeling for the moment that Rita's unfairness gave her a perfect right to try the shot. Probably she shouldn't make the two wickets, anyway, and if she didn't the game was up, for the position of her opponent's ball couldn't be bettered.

"Clear the road," she cried, "here goes for a two-wicket play," and with a clean, graceful drive she sent her ball through the center hoop and into position for the one on the side.

"Good shot," cried Polly Reed, as they all followed the ball. "Now, Jane, you've only to ——"

The click of the mallet put an end to her directions. Jane's ball went slantingly through the wicket and rolled within easy reach of the spot where the other ball lay.

Jane, glancing involuntarily at Rita, saw her dash her hand across her eyes, and twist her pale face into a smile. "That's the end of me," she said, steadying her voice with an effort. "You can't help winning now, Jane."

It was such an exhibition of good sportsmanship, and from so unexpected a source, that Jane could only stare blankly for an instant. But in that brief time a complete readjustment took place

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in her own mind. Suddenly she knew quite surely that she had not been mistaken in thinking her ball out of position, and that either by accident or intention it had been moved when they all ran at the sound of Marian's shriek.

With a quick, strong stroke she sent the ball flying down the field toward the center wicket. "I'm going into position now," she said convincingly. "I saw my ball quite plainly before we ran to Marian, and the finest croquet player on earth couldn't have put it through the wicket as it was then. Perhaps some one jarred it or touched it in running by."

She heard a quick gasp from Carol, who was beside her, and then that astonishing young person said with enthusiasm, "It's up to you now, Rita. Go in and win."

There was a storm of protest from some of the others, who wanted the game played again, but Jane stood firm, saying over and over, "No, no, it wouldn't be fair." To Molly Oliver she added softly, "I started to tell in the first place, but Rita really provoked me—and I tried to think I was mistaken. You won't think I ought not to play on the school team, will you, Molly?"

"Why, of course not. I shall want you all the more," and Molly's comforting arm went around her. For the moment both forgot that Jane

Jane Stuart, Twin

might not be there, and then she herself remembered.

For some reason everything seemed clearer since her victory at croquet. She called it her victory, though Rita was just making the final stroke which would proclaim her winner. Now, Jane was absolutely certain that she couldn't bear the idea of leaving her family to go away with Aunt Caroline, and it needed only the touch of Molly's arm to make her realize that, more than anything else in the world, she wanted to see her mother.

She started toward the front of the house involuntarily, and ran almost into Rob, who had a small box in his hand.

"Oh, Jane, we all wanted you to have this," he said in a low tone. "Rita certainly has the weirdest luck about getting prizes. But, of course, you couldn't do anything else."

"Rob, I'm going home. I'll be back before any one misses me," responded Jane, hardly knowing what he had said to her. "If Davy should happen to notice just tell him I had to see mother about something. And, oh, Rob, please don't let any one come after me or stop me."

"Sure not, but come right back, or you'll spoil my party." Rob wanted to protest, but could not with Jane's anxious eyes fixed upon him so urgently. "Dave is 'round on the piazza with

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my father, and he looks as if he wasn't hearing a word that father says. Is this the way folks behave at parties in Sterling?" he ended mischievously, but he might as well have been talking to air, for Jane was half-way across the lawn.

Just inside her own front door she met Susan Trot, and found, to her dismay, that mother was not at home.

"She told me that she was goin' over to the beach to set on the rocks you all like so much. I guess she must have a headache or somethin', because she looked pretty pale."

This announcement seeming to worry Jane, Miss Trot hastened to add something that she was sure would please her.

"Mis' Eliot sent back a note to you by her man. I put it up in your room."

Jane hurried up-stairs not knowing just what she should do about mother. It was rude in her to leave Rob's party, she supposed, but she would go directly back and —

The note from Aunt Caroline lay on the bureau and she opened it and read it once—twice—three times before she could fully take it in.

"DEAR LITTLE JANE:" it began.

"I've talked to your mother, and I feel sure she sees now what an advantage it will be

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for you to have the year abroad with me. You'll be able to do so much for the whole family if you're properly educated, and you shall have a generous allowance, too, so that you can buy presents for all of them.

"I'm so excited over the prospect that I'm going to hurry in town this afternoon to see about steamer accommodations. We shall want to sail next month, of course, and one needs to be in good season.

"Probably I shall not be back for a day or two, so take good care of my girl, and don't miss me too much.

"Your devoted

"AUNT CAROLINE."

Jane dropped the note on the floor and began with trembling fingers to change the thin shoes for heavy ones. Then she slipped out of her dainty dress, and hunted feverishly for a pink gingham which her mother had let down for her this summer. The party was entirely forgotten. All she could think of was mother, over on the rocks—and Aunt Caroline buying steamer tickets. She had never appreciated before her aunt's resistless way of making people do things whether they wanted to or not. It seemed to her she could not wait to get to mother.

It was usually a half-hour's walk to the rocks, but to-day Jane made it in less time. There was

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a bracing coolness in the late August afternoon which made it easy to walk fast, and she knew no fatigue until she reached the place and found it deserted. Then she realized how tired she was and that she was shaking from head to foot.

"Mother must have gone home the other way, and I've missed her," she said with something clutching at her throat. She had climbed part of the way up the rocks in order to be sure, and now she turned to go back. "I shall have to wait a few minutes until I stop shaking and get rested," she thought forlornly, and then she sat down and dropped her head on her arms, and cried a little.

Some time later, exhausted by trying to think things out for herself, she was just deciding that she must start for home when David's familiar whistle came clearly to her ear.

"Oh, Spinksy!" she cried, getting up and starting to scramble down the rocks to meet him, but her shaky knees made her pause and sit down again limply. She whistled in answer to his signal and waited impatiently.

"Spinksy, you're a darling to come for me," she said when his head and shoulders appeared above the ledge on which she was sitting. "But how ——"

"Rob told me you'd gone to find mother. Miss Trot said mother was on the rocks, and mother,

Jane Stuart, Twin

herself, walked into the house just as I was leaving. She came home by the short cut."

"I—I thought so," quavered Jane. "How—how did she look, Spinksy?"

"Pretty well, thank you. Why, Mrs. Janes, what's the matter? You're shaking like anything. Here, take my coat."

"N-no. I'm not cold. I'm so—so miserable."

David shoved himself along the rocky seat until he was comfortably close to his afflicted sister. "There, now," he invited, slapping his shoulder hospitably, "have it out here. It'll do you good. Is it because you don't want to go off and leave mother, Janey?"

"Y-yes. Mother, and you, Spinksy. And Judy and Ken. And Belhaven."

"And Mr. Chope—and Susan—and Sally," added David with a laugh that held all sorts of gladness. "Oh, Lady Jane, you've given me an awful afternoon. Every one at that party must think I'm the worst kind of a chump, but I don't care, so long as you don't want to go off with Aunt Caroline."

"Want to go! I should say not. Perhaps, just for about a minute, I did think it would be nice, but afterward—— Oh, Spinksy! And you never came near me."

David patted her hand penitently. "I was in

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an awful grouch and scared to death, because mother and I haven't known much about what you were thinking lately."

"I know it. But, Spinksy," Jane's voice was full of sudden terror, "I may have to go. Aunt Caroline left a note for me, and it said that she'd persuaded mother that it would be best for me to go, and she was going in to buy the tickets, or see about them or something."

"I don't believe mother thinks so one little bit," David affirmed stoutly, though his face was sober. "And seeing about the tickets doesn't mean anything. Everybody has to do that beforehand, but they can give them up."

"Oh," breathed Jane. "I suppose I knew that, but I forgot. I'm beginning to feel a little better. Are you pretty sure about mother? You see if I went away she'd have one less to take care of, and perhaps I could help ——"

"Fiddlesticks! You can help mother more by staying right here in this town. And what do you think about me, I should like to know?"

"I think you're the nicest boy that ever lived, and I'm thankful you're my twin," Jane asserted solemnly. "Let's go home. I want my mother."

She got up, very stiff from having sat still so long, and with the uncomfortable shaking in her knees not yet gone.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"I'm so trembly that I'm actually afraid to step over some of these places," she said with a little shudder as David's strong grasp landed her safely on the rock beside him.

"Don't you fret, I'll help ——" David stopped to listen to the tooting of an automobile horn which seemed to be coming rapidly nearer.

"I believe it's Carol. That's her signal for me," cried Jane with returning animation. "I hope it is, for I'm so tired. Can't you whistle, Davy, so that she'll know we're here? And do let's hurry."

David whistled, and the horn tooted in response.

"That's all right. She'll wait," he said. "Be careful when you step here; it's the only bad place."

David stood with his hand outstretched, but Jane didn't take it at once. Instead she looked down on him with such mournful eyes that he wondered if she were still worrying about Aunt Caroline.

"Spinksy," she said plaintively, though there was the hint of a smile about the corners of her mouth, "did you leave the party before they served refreshments? Isn't it horrid to have such a nice chance wasted on both of us? Now that I feel better in my mind I'm hungry."

It was so characteristic of his twin that David

The Winner

had to laugh. "You goose, we'll be home in no time if we ever get started," he scolded, reaching up for her insistently. "Now give me your hand—don't slip."

And then a dreadful thing happened. One minute she was securely poised and smiling down at him, the next, with eyes closed, and all her pretty color gone, she lay in a crumpled heap at his feet.

When Jane opened her eyes she was leaning against some one, and a piteous voice that sounded miles away was saying something that she couldn't quite make out. A white face bent over her and she was sure it was David's, but when she looked again it had changed unaccountably to Rob's

Then everything got nearer and clearer, and she realized that she was in the automobile with her head in Carol's lap and that the two boys were really there. The automobile was flying along at a swift pace, and Carol was murmuring over and over, "Oh, poor Janey. Poor little Jane."

"I'm—all—right," Jane tried to say, but it came out in a funny thick voice that surprised her, and she stopped suddenly.

"Of course you are," cried David and Rob.

"You're going to be home with mother in five minutes," David went on excitedly, a touch of color coming back into his face. "You just missed my hand, and I couldn't catch you."

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Poor old Spinksy!" Jane was speaking quite like herself now. "How near home are we? I want to sit up so that mother won't be scared stiff." But when she tried it the whole world went around in a mad whirl, and she was glad to sink back again.

"Don't you worry," comforted Rob. "Your mother will know that you can't get over a bump like that in a jiffy. Just let us manage."

An hour later when Dr. Reed had pronounced his patient quite sound except for her bumps and bruises, and the excited household had grown somewhat calm, Jane lay very still with her eyes fixed on mother's dear face. Something was necessary for her perfect comfort and she seemed to find it there, for she put up her hand confidently and drew mother's head down on the pillow.

"You couldn't pos-sib-ly spare your helpful—loving—altogether satisfactory—oldest daughter to—to any one, could you, mumsey?" she asked faintly.

Mother's arms went about her in quick response, and Jane sighed from a lightened heart. "It's just as well," she added, nestling as closely as she could, "for nothing on earth that I know of could pos-sib-ly induce her to be spared."

CHAPTER XVIII

SURPRISES

Two days later Jane was taking the afternoon air in the steamer-chair on the porch, a position of honor vacated for her by the Captain, who hovered about anxious to show his gratitude to the entire family of Stuart.

She had insisted that she was perfectly well again and quite able to come down-stairs, and that she couldn't endure her room for another half-day. Deeper than that, however, lay the knowledge that Aunt Caroline was coming this afternoon, and that it would be easier to tell her what had been decided if Jane could be out-of-doors with as many of the family about her as she could muster.

"Jane, would you like me to play any games with you?" asked Judy coming out on the piazza, and hanging over the occupant of the steamer-chair with great affection in her gaze. "Because, if you do, I don't need to go to Marcia Holt's this afternoon, though she did ask me."

"No, thank you." Jane was glad that this time she could decline the dreaded games which Judy

Jane Stuart, Twin

liked so much without hurting her sister's feelings. "Give my love to Serena and tell her I'll be over soon," she called as Judy went off, and then, as an afterthought, "you look awfully nice in that blue dress, honey."

Judy's cheeks flushed faintly, and she threw a kiss to her sister. "I've gained eight pounds since I first came here," she said happily, "and I'm keeping straight on. Mr. Chope says that if I do as well right along, I'll weigh pretty nearly three hundred pounds by the time I'm twenty."

"Horrors! Don't do it." Jane laughed at the picture Judy's words had presented, and watched her sister out of sight. "Judy and I get along much better now," she said to herself. "I must be improving."

There was the sound of some one running downstairs two steps at a time, and David came out on the piazza. "There, I've hunted everywhere for that book for you," he said breathlessly, "and at last I remembered that I had left it up in the attic the last time I scooted up there to escape from some one."

"How do your feelings really feel now that you're down here, Mrs. Janes?" he went on, trying to speak lightly, but hating to see his energetic sister so quiet and pale.

"Oh, I'm all right. Only day before yester-

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day seems ages ago. And I hate to shut my eyes, because I'm back on the rocks again when I do."

David shuddered involuntarily. "Don't speak about it. It'll take me a thousand years to forget the feeling I had when you went down. I don't want to go over there again for some time."

"Oh, pooh! I'm going just as soon as mother will let me, and I shall take a jolly crowd along, because I love those rocks, and I won't let them seem unpleasant to me," answered Jane with great courage.

"All right, but it will be some time before you get me into your 'jolly crowd.' It wasn't your twin who fell, and that makes all the difference, Lady Jane."

"Poor Spinksy." Jane laid her cheek for an instant against the brown hand gripping the side of her chair. "What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Captain and I are going on an errand for mother, and then we're coming back to stay on guard here with you if you want us."

"If I want you! I should say I did. I'm scared blue about meeting Aunt Caroline. Does—does the Captain know what I'm going to tell her?"

"Can't say. I haven't told him. I can't make

Jane Stuart, Twin

out what's the matter with him this last day or two. I'm quite worried about the lad."

David's fatherly air made his twin laugh. "You sound like a grandfather. Anyway he's older than you are."

"Don't I know that? I hate to have him fussed over anything, though, because you couldn't possibly get it out of him if he didn't want to tell. Well, I must find him and go on that errand. What time do you expect Aunt Caroline?"

"Oh, I don't know. Uncle Stephen said they'd come on one of the afternoon trains. I'm all in a flutter when I think about it, because I hate to hurt her feelings."

"Don't get in such a frazzle over it, Mrs. Janes. Perhaps she won't care at all—that is, of course, she'll be sorry to lose you, but she's so changeable she may have a dozen different plans by this time."

"It isn't you who've let her think you'd like to go with her, Davy, and that makes it easier for you to bear it," said Jane, wrinkling her forehead. "I believe I want her to care a little bit."

"Here comes the Captain now." David left the chair beside his sister as he spoke. "All ready, old fellow?"

"I've looked those books in the library twice over and I can't find the one you wanted for Jane," the Captain said perplexedly.

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"Too bad. I forgot to tell you that I found it ten minutes ago and brought it down to her. Let's hurry along now and then we'll come back and stay with the lady."

As the boys left, mother came to say that she was writing a letter and would be out presently to sit with Jane. Then Kenneth brought a downy yellow chicken to show to his sister.

"Rob Randall gave it to me," he explained. "I'm going to name it for Captain, and one of Mr. Chope's hens is going to be its mother, and I'm going to have a whole hen business starting with this one. You be thinking up what you'd like to have me buy you with the second money I earn, Janey."

"Oh, why not with the first?" pleaded his sister trying to look hurt.

"Nope. That's mother's. You and Judy will have to divvy up on second. Poor Davy has to wait till third, and he isn't fussing."

"Well, I won't then. It's pretty hard on me to have to live up to Spinksy, though. What are you going to do with your chicken now?"

"Take it back till Mr. Chope finds a mother for it." Kenneth's eyes held a gleam of mischief. "I'll tell Rob you like it. He thinks a great deal of your opinion about hens, you know."

"Horrors!" groaned Jane. "That joke is get-

Jane Stuart, Twin

ting gray with age. You needn't tell Rob anything about me."

"I won't. You can tell him yourself. He's just getting over the piazza railing back of your chair," giggled Kenneth, running off to put his chicken in safety.

"Did I scare you? I thought Ken would warn you that I was coming," apologized Rob, noticing Jane's startled face. "We'll have to get up a new joke, won't we? It's too bad to bother you with the old one, though I shall always cherish the memory of that speckled hen."

He ended in a tone of mournful resignation that made Jane laugh. "I don't really mind it," she said. "But I'm always doing absurd things, and there'll be a chance for plenty of new jokes on me."

"Not if you go away," murmured Rob, looking very sober.

"But I'm not going," Jane protested. "I'm going to stay right here in Belhaven, and go to school, and find out what good times you have in the winter."

"Bully for you!" Rob threw up his cap with so joyous a flourish that it came down on the lawn some distance away. "Do the other girls and boys know?"

"Not yet. I'm afraid they're all thinking I'm

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a perfect freak because I ran away from your nice party so rudely. Truly I meant to go right back, but I just couldn't."

"Oh, well—that's all right," answered Rob haltingly. Then his eyes twinkled. "If any one dares to tell me that you're a freak," he went on with a serious air, "I shall simply explain that where you came from they're not used to having refreshments, and you thought the party was over."

"Wr-retch!" began Jane, but before she could think of a sufficiently crushing retort the sight of Carol turning in at the front walk brought a greeting to her lips.

"Are you receiving afternoon calls?" asked Carol gayly. "I'm coming, too."

"Have you heard the good news?" Rob demanded. "Allow me to introduce to you Miss Jane Stuart, who's going to honor Belhaven with her society this coming winter."

"Truly? You're not going with your aunt? It sounds too good to be true, because—oh, Janey, I'm so glad—I expect to be here, too."

"You?" Jane could hardly believe her ears. "I thought you never stayed."

"We never have, but it has done mother so much good this summer that the doctor wants her to stay on. And I'm wild to see how I shall like

Jane Stuart, Twin

going to school regularly and being with the girls."

"Nothing like it," said Rob, dropping down on the lawn to pick up his cap. Then he came back to lean on the piazza rail for a moment. "I know you two girls are dying to talk secrets, so I'll go. And I'm awfully glad that both of you are going to stay, and do you mind if I spread the joyful news? No? You don't mind? Well, I'm off. Tell David I'll see him later."

"I can stay only a few minutes," said Carol, settling down in the chair beside Jane, "because mother wants me to go out with her. She was terribly worried when she heard about your fall, and she's coming to take you out in the automobile to-morrow if you're able."

"If I hadn't such a lovely disposition I should be jealous," she hurried on, interrupting Jane's thanks, "because mother talks so much about you. We're getting to be pretty chummy ourselves, though, thanks to the Stuart family."

"The Stuart family? Why, what do you mean?" Jane was looking at her friend in frank surprise.

"Oh, well—you're all so nice to each other—and you and David are so square about everything," murmured Carol. "You gave me an awful fright at Rob's party, all the same."

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“How did we?”

“Not ‘we’ but you, Janey, when you went through those last two wickets, and I thought you were going to keep on. I hit your ball when we all ran and then I couldn’t bear to put it back again. You see I foolishly thought you hadn’t seen it and I didn’t dream I was putting you in—in such a trap. If you hadn’t walked out of it all right I should never have forgiven myself.”

“It was sneaky of me to take one stroke,” murmured Jane contritely, “because underneath everything I knew where that ball ought to be. But I just tried to bury all my good feelings under not liking Rita and wanting to win. What should you have done if I had gone on and hit the stake and walked off with the prize?”

“Nothing—I suppose,” Carol answered slowly, —“only—my idea of you would have taken a tumble, and I don’t believe I should be feeling this violent desire to play fair, and be dependable the way you and David are.”

Jane looked at her friend seriously. “You’re lots like me,” she said at last. “I’m always making good resolutions and—and usually not keeping them.”

“Well—anyway—that’s better than making bad ones. Shake hands on it, Lady Jane. Perhaps

Jane Stuart, Twin

some day we'll hit it off and accidentally keep a good one. Please remember that I shall be disappointed in you, my che-ild, if you're not a perfectly good model for me."

"The Beautiful Example of Jane, or the Story of a Good Child," murmured Jane, drawing her face down primly. "Just watch me. Oh, must you go? I'd love to have you stay."

"I'll see you to-morrow. Good-bye." Carol was half-way down the walk when she turned and came flying back. "Oh, Janey, Janey," she said, hugging her friend so hard that she brought tears to her own eyes. "I'm so glad you came to Belhaven, and gladder still that you're not going off with your aunt."

Jane sat very still for a while after Carol had finally departed, with her eyes fixed on the green distance, and her mind busy with the events of the last six weeks. "She ought to have a better model than I am," she said at last with a sigh, and then she picked up the book David had found for her, and began to read.

A sudden apologetic cough startled her, and she looked up to find Mr. Chope standing just outside the piazza railing and regarding her anxiously.

"Ahem, Sally sent me in to ask how you're feelin' to-day," he said. "She's got to go to the blacksmith, and she didn't really feel like ap-

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pearin' in public till she'd got the latest bulletin concernin' your health."

Jane tried to look serious, but dimpled in spite of herself. "Please tell her that I'm all well," she answered with all the gravity she could command, "and say that I send my love to her."

"I'll do that," said Mr. Chope with his most engaging smile, "and I'll break the news to her that you've got that hole in your cheek in workin' order. That'll tell the story better'n anythin'." He walked off with his shoulders shaking, and Jane's irresistible laughter ringing in his ears.

Jane picked up her book again, but put it down as the Captain came into view, this time alone.

"David'll be along in a few minutes," he said, understanding at once her questioning gaze. He came up on the piazza and sat down on the railing near the steamer-chair, and Jane noticed for the first time how pale he was, and that the dark eyes held the old sorrowful expression.

"You're sure nothing has happened to you since we've been gone?" he went on with a half-smile. "Davy had to go on another errand, but he wanted me to hurry home and ——"

"Spinksy would spoil me if I didn't nobly fight against it all the time," interrupted Jane. "It's such a responsibility to feel that you must keep some one else from being too unselfish." She

Jane Stuart, Twin

breathed a pensive sigh, but the laugh in her eyes made the boy's sober face brighten.

"David's the best ever," he responded warmly. "It takes a long time to find out all his good points. I haven't come to the end of them yet." The dark eyes were staring far beyond Jane now, and the next words came slowly, and as though he didn't realize what he was saying. "I don't know what I'm going to do without David."

"What do you mean?" demanded Jane, sitting up as straight as the steamer-chair would permit, and regarding him anxiously. "Why should you have to do without him? Aren't you going to belong to our family?"

The Captain looked at her with an air of embarrassment which she couldn't understand. "Of course I am, if you'll all have me," he said trying to speak lightly. "But I can belong just the same, can't I, even if I'm not here. You see, I'm beginning to feel that I ought to get to work."

"I just knew you had something on your mind." Jane's manner was distinctly aggrieved. "You mustn't think of such a thing until you're perfectly strong. I know mother wouldn't listen to it."

There was silence for a moment, and Jane settled back in her chair and tried hard to think of something very cheerful to say.

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Suddenly the long whistle of a distant train recalled her own particular trials.

"Oh, dear," she said nervously, "I wonder if that's Aunt Caroline's train. It gives me cold shivers to think of it. Don't go away, will you, until mother and Spinksy come. I simply can't face her all alone."

"Why can't you?" It was an evident relief to the boy to have Jane as the topic of conversation rather than himself. "I thought you were very fond of her, and that she was going to take you to Europe, and take care of ——"

"Oh, but don't you see I couldn't leave mother and Davy," protested Jane, the old terror coming over her with renewed force. "If you had a twin you'd know that you couldn't go three thousand miles away from him. And then mother!" Jane's face, and the involuntary shudder with which she ended were altogether convincing.

"Do you mean to say ——" the boy was bending toward her eagerly, but he stopped speaking as she went on rapidly.

"Of course I am fond of Aunt Caroline. How could I help it when she's been so good to me? But"—a perplexed frown puckered Jane's smooth forehead now—"well, I can't exactly explain what I mean, but somehow there doesn't seem to be any Jane Stuart left when I'm with Aunt

Jane Stuart, Twin

Caroline. I'm just something to be dressed up, and petted and amused. It was great fun for a while, but lately it has made me feel a little wriggly. Just as if something was fastened around me, and I couldn't get it off." Jane laughed a little at her ineffectual attempt at an explanation.

"It was an e-nor-mous relief to find that mother hadn't any idea of letting me go," she continued with a little sigh. "But Aunt Caroline took it so much for granted that I'm scared blue over having to tell her. I'm afraid she'll be so hurt."

"Do you mean that you don't want to go to Europe, and be provided for and made an heiress?" There was such a queer thrill in the Captain's voice that Jane looked at him in astonishment. Why should he be so excited over this, she wondered. He was paler than ever, it seemed to her, and the eager, expectant stare of his black eyes made her uneasy.

"I don't know what you mean about being an heiress, but that wouldn't make the slightest difference," she answered decidedly. "I just want to live in my own family, that's all, and have what they have."

"Then—why, then ——" a sudden color rushed into the boy's cheeks and he got up quickly and started toward the front door. "Sit perfectly still until I come back. I have something to show



THE MYSTERIOUS BAG

Surprises

you. Perhaps ——” his voice floated back as he ran into the house and up-stairs.

“Did you ever see the like of that?” Jane said to herself, gazing after him blankly. “‘Perhaps’ what, I should like to know. He went off like a whole bunch of fire-crackers.”

“What’s the matter, Janey?” asked mother, coming out of the front door with her sewing. “The Captain begged me to come out here as soon as I could. I was afraid something had happened to you.”

“Not yet,” answered Jane, making up a funny little face, “except to have the Captain go popping off that way. He absolutely commanded me to stay perfectly still. You’ll stand by for the rest of the afternoon, won’t you, mumsey?”

Mrs. Stuart couldn’t help smiling at her daughter’s anxious face. “Janey, the things we worry about most very often don’t happen at all,” she encouraged. “I shouldn’t be surprised ——” she stopped suddenly, for just then David, who had come unheard across the lawn, vaulted over the piazza railing, and at the same moment the Captain came out of the house.

In his hand was the mysterious bag which the Stuart children had been strictly forbidden to mention until the boy, himself, should be willing to disclose his secret. Jane’s eyes sparkled at sight

Jane Stuart, Twin

of it; then she was conscious of a feeling of distinct disappointment. In her imagination she had often planned this scene, and she wanted to have plenty of time to enjoy it. Now, they might be interrupted at any moment by Aunt Caroline.

"This bag was given to me by the woman I thought was my mother," the Captain began in a queer choked voice, "and she said it was put into her hands out in California by a woman who was dying, and who begged her to take care of her baby. I was the baby, and these are the pictures of my father and mother."

He put the photograph in Mrs. Stuart's hand as he ended, and to Jane he gave a little framed, tinted picture of a beautiful black-haired girl whose eyes were like his own.

"Why, dear boy—why, children," exclaimed mother, jumping up so suddenly that scissors and spools clattered to the floor. "This is a picture of my cousin, Donald Lee, Aunt Caroline's son. There's one like it in the album. I must get ——" and then she sat down, and stared at the boy, turning so pale, meanwhile, that he was frightened.

"Are you—shall you be sorry if I am your cousin?" he asked, looking at her with his wistful smile.

"My dear, I should be glad. But it's a little startling. And I'm thinking of Aunt Caroline."

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"She doesn't care for boys, does she? But perhaps I can make her like me. I can't prove that I am her grandson except by these and this," he took something else from the bag, but before he could show it, Jane spoke.

"You're the living image of your lovely mother," she said decidedly. "At least you will be when your cheeks are rounder, and you get a little color. I think your mouth and chin are like your father, though."

"It takes an artist's eye to pick any one's features apart that way," said David, "but you really do look like the pictures, and—and I'm awfully glad you're our cousin. What shall we call you? Not Captain now, of course."

"His name ought to be Donald—like his father, and Aunt Caroline will have to get used to a boy," said Jane, speaking rather loud in her excitement, and becoming conscious all of a sudden that mother and the others were looking at her, or rather just beyond her, in a peculiar sort of way.

"What's all this about Aunt Caroline?" asked the voice of that lady herself. "We left the machine out of sight and came quietly to surprise you, and now I find you talking about me. Well, well!"

Uncle Stephen was just behind her, and they came up on the piazza before the startled group

Jane Stuart, Twin

could think of any way in which to soften the shock which must come to her.

"What's all this?" she demanded again gaily. "You look as though ——" and then her glance fell upon the photograph, lying unheeded in Mrs. Stuart's lap, and leaped from there to the object which the boy was still holding in his hand.

"Let—let me see that," she said to the boy, and she put her hand to her throat and swayed a little as she spoke. David thought she was going to fall, and instinctively put out an arm to support her, but she waved him away, and stared at the handsome dark face confronting her as if she had never seen it before.

"This watch belonged to my father," said the boy with a proud lift of the head, and laid it in her hand without another word.

Aunt Caroline's lips quivered and tears filled her eyes. She looked at the monogram on the outside, then passed the watch to her husband. "Open it," she begged in a shaking voice. "There should be an inscription inside."

It was there, just as she had seen it in memory, "D. R. L. from mother;" and then the date.

"I gave that watch to him when he was eighteen," she said piteously, "and now it comes back to me—comes back to me."

"And we believe this is Donald's son who has

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brought it back, Aunt Caroline," said Mrs. Stuart, putting her arm around the boy's shoulders. His tense anxiety alarmed her, and she longed to give him comfort.

"Donald's son," Aunt Caroline repeated almost in a whisper. She looked from one to another with the wide-eyed stare of a child, and, lastly, her gaze rested on the boy again.

"Your hair grows on your forehead just as my boy's did," she said in a hushed voice, creeping close to him and staring as if she could not take her eyes away from the troubled, boyish face. "And—and your mouth is like his." Then, the next moment, her arms were around him, and her head on his shoulder, and she was crying and laughing and talking all at the same time.

"Stephen, this is my grandson—the son of my Donald—do you understand?" she sobbed.

"These are the only proofs I have, sir," said the boy, looking at Uncle Stephen appealingly and trying hard to keep his self-control.

"They seem good enough to me," Uncle Stephen answered quietly. "I'm quite ready to believe that you are Donald Lee, and anyway the law can make you so if there's any doubt about it."

"Law! Nonsense!" Aunt Caroline was restored to immediate calmness by having any uncertainty ascribed to her decision.

Jane Stuart, Twin

"Certainly we'll have everything done that's necessary," she conceded, "but I'm absolutely convinced. And, of course, he would be named for his father. You're quite right about that, Stephen." She was becoming more and more her alert, managing self each moment. "I had always supposed my grandchild would be named for me, but after all I had no real reason for thinking the baby was a girl."

"I hope you don't mind so very much because I'm a boy," said Donald Lee, smiling a little unsteadily. "Because a boy likes having a grandmother just as much as a girl does." His eyes went to Uncle Stephen, too, as if he wanted to say that finding a grandfather was by no means the smallest part of his good-fortune.

"Why, I love boys," affirmed Aunt Caroline, quite convinced of the truth of her assertion. "Girls, too, of course. But a boy of my own!

"Now, Elizabeth, I'm going to take my grandson over to the hotel for dinner," she went on briskly. "I'll send him back here to-night, because the hotel is full, but I must begin to plan right away what he is to do next winter. A boy's education and future are so important."

Jane felt a little shiver run over her at these last words. Was her explanation with Aunt Caroline coming at last? She got up from the steamer-

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chair, and went to lean against mother, whose arm went around her understandingly.

"I believe, Elizabeth," Aunt Caroline said in a low tone, "that I shall take Donald to the mountains with me next month and then south during the winter. He looks very pale and rather delicate. Don't you think so?"

"Well, yes," assented Mrs. Stuart. "But he's had a severe illness, and it's no small excitement to find a grandmother and grandfather so suddenly. He'll be all right after a while."

"Well—I hope so. We must go now. Jane, you look pale too. Oh, your Uncle Stephen did tell me you'd had a fall. I'm glad it was no worse. You must come over and see me when you feel better. Good-bye all. Come, Donald."

Aunt Caroline fluttered down the walk toward the automobile, but Uncle Stephen lingered an instant with his arm linked in that of his new grandson. "We boys," he said softly with his friendly whimsical smile, "we boys know where we've been well taken care of, and we'll be back before long."

Jane's glance went from mother to David, and then back to mother again as the automobile rolled away. "Would you mind pinching me—just a little easy pinch," she said plaintively. "I feel as though I ought to wake up or—or do something sensible. Is it all a fairy-story?"

Jane Stuart, Twin

"It seems very real," answered mother, looking a little dazed, and still staring at the car, which was fast disappearing.

"Donald Lee,"—said David feebly, "Donald Lee—my cousin, Donald Lee ——"

"Mother!" Jane interrupted in an awestruck voice. "Do you realize that we've found 'little Caroline'? Here she's been in this house for weeks, and we never once guessed he was Aunt Caroline's granddaughter. Oh, I know I'm mixed, but I'm so disappointed to think I didn't help any about finding her—I mean him."

"But you did—you did," asserted David strongly. "Donald just told me while Aunt Caroline was talking to mother, that if you had wanted to be adopted and go to Europe he shouldn't have said anything about it. He'd already written to Mr. Bobbin asking him to come and take him away."

Jane's face brightened. She was silent for a moment, and then she giggled suddenly. "Isn't it dreadful," she gasped, trying to stop laughing and not succeeding in the least, "isn't it dreadful—that Aunt Caroline's feelings—were so hurt because—I didn't want to go with her? I'm—I'm so mad with her for not feeling a little bit sorry."

Mother and David echoed her laughter.

"It was a good joke on you, all right, Mrs.

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Janes," her twin said as soon as he could speak. "But just think of our joy."

Jane started to answer, but the sudden tooting of horns and the persistent beating of a drum stopped the words on her lips. Almost immediately two automobiles shot into sight and came to a standstill in front of the house. They were filled with girls and boys, and Peggy Curtis' small brother was lustily plying his drumsticks in the first one.

Judy, who had been picked up on her way home, jumped out of Dr. Reed's car just as Kenneth ran in from the barn.

"They can't come in," she announced importantly. "Dr. Reed won't let 'em. But they've been making up poetry about you."

All of a sudden a chorus of young voices woke the echoes.

"Jane and David ! Rah ! Rah ! Rah !
Nice Stuart family ! Rah ! Rah ! Rah !
We've come to say,
We're glad you'll stay,
Jane Stuart ! Jane Stuart ! Rah ! Rah ! Rah !"

Then they cheered each member of the family, not omitting Mr. Chope, who was standing in the barn-door, and Susan gazing admiringly from the back porch. That done, with the last "Rah !

Jane Stuart, Twin

Rah!" still lingering on the air, the automobiles slid away, and the jolly laughing crowd was gone.

"Wasn't that sweet of them?" said Jane turning to her mother with shining eyes. And then, with the old-time impetuosity, she tried to put her arms around them all, mother, David, Judy and Ken, and, failing in the attempt, as she always did, embraced each one separately.

"Oh, mother, Spinksy—all of you," she said ardently, "aren't they the dearest girls and boys you ever saw, and isn't Belhaven the good-timiest place? I never want to go away from here."

There was a long-drawn whistle from David, and at sight of his funny smile Jane couldn't help laughing too.

"Oh, I know I haven't always thought so," she went on with a little toss of her head. "But Aunt Caroline and I can change our minds, I want you to understand; and—and you'll have to like us just—the—same."

Another Story in this Series is:
JANE STUART'S CHUM





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